

Emeralds for Trade

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Emeralds for Trade

by [prelovedsinner](#)

Summary

"You never left your fucking land until a fragile prince with a pretty face walked into the picture," he snarled, charging forward.

"We're not so different, you and I," the king began, lifting the bone mask from his face and glaring down with piercing green eyes that marked his enemy's last breaths.

He tossed it to the ground, before pressing his foot down on the trembling man's chest. Ignoring the pleading and clawing, he raised his sword above his head, body taut, using all his strength when he snapped back down like a rubber band.

"I've got a bit of an ego myself."

(After meeting at a ball, Dream has taken a liking to Prince George and the way he blushes so pretty. But Dream's a bit of a cocky bastard and George doesn't like that.)

Your Stars, But Different

Chapter Summary

Prince George finds himself at a ball, miles away from home, amongst aristocrats who are less than welcoming. A certain king takes notice of him.

Chapter Notes

I know it's a side plot, but I need to clarify: Wilbur and Niki's relationship is platonic! Because of his hopeless romantic personality, he finds it hard to distinguish romantic from platonic at first (might be a bi thing, idk) but they find their footing eventually, hence the 'platonic soulmates' tag.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The queen fussed over the young prince's blazer. The blue cloth was sewn with intricate geometric designs that drew attention to a small but brilliant diamond that was embedded over where his heart was. Although it fitted his form nicely, his mother was picking out invisible stray threads and dust particles small enough that a convex lens would be needed to even notice its presence.

"Darling, you know you don't have to go, right? The Emeralds-"

"Yes, yes, I know. You've told me what they're like," George assured gently, though he had yet to stop her from incessantly brushing his outfit.

"I know that you're more than capable, we just worry-"

"*Mum*, I'm fine." The young prince's slender fingers wrap around his mother's wrists, gently pulling them away from his suit.

Her concerns were not unfounded. Apart from their neighboring Kingdom of Gold, George had yet to meet with foreign royals. Although he was well capable, he had never experienced firsthand the passive aggression, the condescending tones that his parents experience every time a glistening, stamped invitation arrives at their doorstep.

Even worse, this was Emerald - the richest kingdom in their continent. They had won a war all the way from across the ocean just two years before. He didn't even have to personally step foot on a boat. The king was said to be ruthless with a sword, and dangerously charming. He needed to make a good impression in hopes of solidifying strong allies in the future.

"You've spent 20 years raising me to be charming and compassionate. I remember my manners and etiquette, I can manage a ball. I want to attend."

The queen tutted, taking a step back and turning the young man towards the mirror. Through it, he watched her reach for something behind her. His eyes flickered to his advisor and friend who was standing by the door, an amused smile on his face. He gave George an encouraging wink, causing

George to smile and bite back a laugh. He felt a gentle weight press on his head as she placed a thin, silver diadem embedded with a few small, brilliant blue gems. It was rather humble for a crown of royal status, but it suited him well.

With arms wrapping around him, she rests her chin on his shoulder. The two look eyes through the mirror, a soft smile on her highness' carefully powdered face. The short speech she had prepared proved to be unneeded as her son gleamed before her with sophistication, warmth, and resilience. Just as how a young prince should hold himself.

"My handsome prince. We're so proud of you, son," she whispered, planting a gentle kiss on George's cheek.

"Of course you are," he spoke playfully, though the gentleness in his tone said more than needed.

They arrived at the ball, finally, after nearly half a day's journey.

Passing through the Obsidian kingdom proved more troublesome than expected, considering they had only recently been acknowledged as a real country.

The self-proclaimed king had lived in the area, once unclaimed land on the cusp of Gold and Emerald, in nothing but dense forestry. In just five years, the young leader had managed to raise the population tenfold and erect buildings comparable in strength to that of Diamond's city planning.

Despite that, years of arguments, discussions, and a war that was short-lived finally amounted to the continent-wide acknowledgement of the Obsidian region last month. It was impressive. From what he heard, the opposing leader would probably never forget the sight of a blade pointed to his throat by a man with pink hair and a steel gaze.

The guards were, understandably, stricter than they would have been before things got messy.

His parents had met with the hulking king once before, he recalled mother mentioning. A man with long pink hair, a veil that took the form of a hog, broad shoulders draped in a thick red cape and lined with fine fur. They had met with him over a buffet with Gold and no conflict arose. Still, despite their relationship being void of hostility or animosity, what would typically be a half-hour long transit turned into two hours.

Luckily, they had taken into account the potential bumps in the road. They reached the gates right on time.

Their arrival at the pearly gates of Emerald truly was a sight to behold. George had to consciously prevent his jaw from dropping in awe. The castle looked like it was made by the gods themselves.

Tall windows littered the smooth quartz exterior, all stained a light green tint. Even the accents to the pillars were painted with what seemed to be real gold and emerald; An unnecessarily effective show of status. Diamond's castle dwarfed in comparison. Years of royal education did not do justice in portraying the sheer wealth that the foreign kingdom exuded. This was old money, and the prince had never felt so young.

Walking through to the ballroom felt like a haze of blue linen and assuring shoulder squeezes.

Some curious gazes fell over the young, unfamiliar prince walking behind the King and Queen of Diamond. Anxiety had been served to him on a silver plate without his approval. While the averting gazes of the servants made his stomach queasy, watching his family stride forward in confidence and elegance calmed his nerves bit by bit and soon, he followed in stride.

I'm okay, he thought. This isn't as scary as I had expected.

His mother gave him one final encouraging look over her shoulder before they drifted over to the corner of the ball where kings and queens were somewhat congregated. This left him in the crowd of strangers, having to put his lessons into practice.

A sea of bright reds, royal blues and all the other colours symbolic of the different countries within the region (and a few from beyond, he recognised) all gathered in one room under the guise of a party. When really, he knew that this was just an informal business meeting.

"Prince George?" A familiar voice spoke to his right. And god, did it feel like a welcoming hand of comfort pulling him to shore. Beside him now stood the curly-haired boy with the warm smile and heart of gold. He was dressed as such, clad in a bright gold coat that draped long over his cream, silken tunic.

"Prince Soot," George breathed out with a relaxed smile inching its way onto his face. "Lovely to see you again. You look wonderful today."

"As do you, your highness," the other prince responded warmly.

"How have you been, my friend? Danced with any maidens yet? Surely there are one or two who catch your eye."

Wilbur laughed at that, a faint blush rising to his cheeks. He glanced up to the area which sat a few kings and queens. George's attention was directed towards the group, which included his own parents, King Phil Watson and King Technoblade himself.

Well, he used the term 'King' lightly. With Technoblade, the young ruler did not refer to himself as a king. He identified himself as the Leader of the Obsidian Region. His pink locks paired with the hog mask that covered the upper half of his face stuck out like a sore thumb - The only other royal who hid his face was the King of Emerald himself.

Perhaps following the normalcy of aristocratic culture and adhering to the unnecessary unspoken rules were not his forte. George respected that. It was exhausting to keep up sometimes. Though, he did wonder what the two were hiding under there. He was used to seeing the faces of those around him, gauging their expressions and emotions, and reacting accordingly.

He wondered if his parents mentioned the hassle that Obsidian borders caused them. Though, given the polite nature of his parents, he doubted it.

"The King of Obsidian? Surely not," George said with a laugh.

The other man's face contorted to a scowl, making George laugh again, stifling it into his hand to prevent its volume from turning heads.

"Of course not. But amongst his entourage is a lovely Lady. Locks of gold, gentle hands and kind eyes. Absolutely enchanting."

The earlier look of distaste had softened completely to one of eager curiosity as he glanced over at her occasionally, careful not to make his attention apparent. Only then did George notice the petite

woman behind Techno. She was talking to a servant boy with brown hair, about the same age as Tommy. Prince Tommy was instead trying to drag him off to somewhere else, speaking animatedly.

"She's his second in command. We spoke earlier this evening, in passing, but I have yet to ask her to dance. She told me I had a voice like a sunset, can you believe that?"

Seeing the shift in Wilbur's tone when mentioning the maiden made George's heart swell slightly. Though they hadn't known each other for long, it was nice seeing a friend's soft spot being hit. It was endearing.

"Sounds to me like you should go have a word with her."

"Me? Oh gosh, I couldn't... Could I? It would be improper, wouldn't it?"

"Why would it be?" George urged with a gentle nudge to his shoulder. "Prince Wilbur, Gold and Obsidian's relations are stable at the moment. Perhaps a union could be of Technoblade's benefit."

He hummed out a noise of contemplation, before pacing backwards a few steps, beckoning the other to follow him as he did. George found himself whisked away to the refreshments table. Wilbur's following tone had a hint of lighthearted teasing.

"If I do recall, the last time we spoke, you mentioned that you had never been involved in international gatherings. This wouldn't be your first time, would it?"

"That would be right," George confirmed with a shy smile, taking a tentative sip of his wine. "I have quite the first impression to make on others. I'm sure, being the wonderful friend that you are, you could introduce me to some of the others here."

Wilbur glanced around the room as he considered it.

"Although I'd like to, I feel as though it would ruin the first impression. You're a charismatic young lad, I doubt you'd need me at all," Wilbur encouraged with a pat on the back. George hummed in response, taking a sip of his wine.

"I suppose that's true."

A moment of silence passed between them before Wilbur seemed to concede.

"However, since I am familiar with most here, I suppose I could point out some significant faces and tell you what to look out for. Some interesting characters reside amongst the aristocrats, and even I wish I had a retrospective when I first joined the scene. You'll get the fresh start I wish I had."

"Really? I would really appreciate that, thank you, Prince Wilbur."

The taller man smiled warmly, giving a dismissive nod.

"So you see that man on the opposite side of the room with the horns of a ram?"

Wilbur looked down at his drink as he spoke, letting George glance over casually to the direction mentioned. There stood a well-dressed individual that donned a dark grey, almost black suit. His dark brown facial hair was short, but thick and covered his cheeks and upper lip. He had a calm expression, though his focused eyes seemed to scan the room. Littering his cheekbones were the marks of the Nether, scar-like lines that extended from under his eyes.

The shorter man let out a hum in response, ensuring his gaze doesn't linger for too long. He looked away just before the man looked at their direction.

"King of Netherite. I'd stay away if I were you. I'm sure you've heard of what happened between him and Technoblade, he's ruthless."

Only when he was reminded of it did he notice the tension between Obsidian's ruler and Netherite's King could be felt, despite them being on different sides of the room. It was nice to finally be able to place a face to the name. King Schlatt was infamous for being cunning and unyielding in his pursuit of expansion, and Obsidian wasn't the first victim of his. The conquest had definitely not been without casualties, either.

He would be sure to stay far away enough from the king if possible.

"I have indeed. His name isn't one that's easily forgotten. Why is he here, isn't he from the Nether region?"

"Well, he has bases in a few countries here. Lapis, Redstone... Being such a large stakeholder, King Clayton would be more or less obligated to send an invite, even across to the next continent."

"Of course."

Wilbur carried on, pointing out a couple of other aristocrats and letting him know what they were like and how to gain their favour. George took a mental note of each one and prepped himself for a series of polite introductions.

They took another few steps around so George was once again more or less facing the table his parents sat at.

"I know you haven't met Techno formally yet, but he's a respectable man. As long as you don't ask about the mask; He'll bring it up to you if he feels like it. Give him no reason to upset him, and he will show you nothing but kindness. He once gave Tommy a whole new axe after he mentioned that it was blunt from hunting. Young lad's got a bit of a temper on him, but that cheered him up rather quick."

"That's nice of him. I remember hearing Tommy's yelling all the way from my chambers the other day when you visited," George recalled with a laugh, which Wilbur echoed.

"Sounds like him, alright. On that note though, I should probably go make sure he isn't up to any mischief. I hope that was a decent masterclass on the scene of Royalty."

"It was more than helpful, thank you again."

"Of course, anytime."

"Oh, and Wilbur?"

"Yes?"

"Ask the lady to dance, it won't kill you."

Wilbur's cheeks flushed a rosy pink and he gave a curt nod and a wink, before disappearing back into the crowd and looking for his younger brother. George was alone once again, with a glass of wine in his hand and a vague idea of what to do next.

The following hour or so was spent getting acquainted with other princes and princesses. The kings and queens who weren't too untouchable also gave George some of their time, exchanging brief introductions and shallow smiles. It got tiring after a while. Nobody had laughed or made him laugh as Wilbur had, and he had yet to make a new friend in the room.

Every time he would join in on a group's conversation, the topic would shift to George and his personal life, which he felt uncomfortable opening up about. He usually managed to segue the conversation to more familiar, surface-level ones. However, the young prince found himself standing with the King of Redstone, who was really testing his patience.

"I heard," the King before him began with a wide, condescending smile, "that Diamond's King is a weak man. Please don't take offence to this, I ask out of concern. But he has taught you how to fight, right?"

To add to his point, he pressed a gentle push to George's shoulder with two fingers.

He seemed pleasantly surprised when George didn't budge from his spot. Instead, he stood firm. Despite the blatant slander of his father's name, he forced out a polite smile, fuelled with passive aggression. He knew how to play the game, he had to keep a level head and stick to his strategy.

His father was kind, not weak. Although George hadn't been taught to fight, he had been raised with lessons on city planning, history and the arts. He had read enough books to fill a library, he was smart with his tongue and sharper with a quill. There was no need to prove this to the prince before him. Wilbur had mentioned that this man tests people's temper as a means of assessment, and George was not about to show any sign of weakness.

"Of course, none taken. He's made me strong in my own right. King Alastair, are you familiar with Sun Tzu?"

Alastair looked even more surprised, the condescending smile losing its malice.

"Of course. 'The wise warrior avoids the battle.' Smart man."

He held out his hand, an olive branch extended which George accepted with an internal sigh of relief. They shake hands, with as firm a grip as their understanding of one another. It was an unspoken test, and George knew that the amicable exchange meant that he'd passed.

"Thank you, King Alastair."

"Call me Eret."

He'd passed the test.

The next few royals he met weren't as quick to warm up to him. His patience was wearing thin as he dealt with similar condescending comments. It took a lot of tiptoeing to walk the line between being polite enough to not offend, and being sharp enough to not be stepped on. George hadn't anticipated this to have such a drain on his energy and he soon found himself needing to pull away for a breather.

With a polite smile, he excused himself. *'One too many glasses of this fine wine,'* he joked,

drawing a few curt laughs from the group. He navigated his way to the balcony, passing through the tall curtains and closing the glass doors behind him.

The moonlight falling gently against the pristine quartz balcony served as a sharp contrast from the glaring ballroom with candle-lit chandeliers. In there, it felt cold; artificial, fake. Despite the unfamiliar late autumn breeze, the slits of light between the barrier of pillars felt warm and inviting, lined with rows of gold-stemmed roses. The designs on them were intricate, painstakingly hand-crafted, and the same can be said for the stone bench adorned with green gems. This prompted the young prince to take a rest on the cool seat.

He let out a breath he didn't know he was holding and enjoyed the view. With the cool late autumn breeze mellowing his thoughts and sending a shiver down his spine, he glanced up.

Sometimes, when things seem uncertain, the stars can be your anchor. Always present in the night sky, if you were to just pay a little more attention. It takes a couple of moments for eyes to adjust to the darkness. But when it does, you'll see distant lanterns you would have otherwise never noticed, nestled far beyond the stratosphere.

To George's surprise, however, the freckles littering the vacuum above seemed to have tripled in number. *Was it always like this here?*

A dollop of envy was added to his plate, and along with it, awe.

He had always thought the stars were beautiful as they were, but had never considered that they could look... *different*. If there was an option to move his home here to look at this version of the scene endlessly, he would take it in a heartbeat.

"Gorgeous, isn't it?" A voice spoke from behind him.

He hadn't heard the door open. Or perhaps, it didn't open at all, and the stranger was already stood somewhere on the balcony, out of view of the young prince. George turned his head.

The moonlight didn't do much to illuminate him, so the prince could not quite see the colour of the man's suit, nor the colour of the gems on his crown. They almost seemed gold, but that surely couldn't be the case, else he would have recognised the voice behind it.

The quiet tread of the man's polished loafers followed around the bench before he sat next to the now dumbfounded George. He didn't even look at the young prince yet. In his hands twirled a rose, suspiciously similar to the ones that lined the barriers of the balcony. Blooming red, with a golden stem that almost glistened in the moonlight.

"Did you just pick that?" George asked incredulously.

"I did."

"I don't think that's allowed..."

"Really?"

His accent, George noticed, was not southern, so he was definitely closer to central or northern territories.

"Yes, I doubt the King would be very happy with someone plucking his beautiful property."

The man turned his head.

Instead of eyes, staring back at George was two circles and a wide smile, carved into some kind of white convex disc. The aforementioned mask covered half his face, with a few tufts of (what he assumed to be) dirty blond hair just barely spilling over the top of it. The material seemed too matte to be metal but too smooth to just be wood. The indentations were emphasized with some sort of black stain, George guessed that it was probably ink. It stopped right around the man's nose, revealing the amused smirk on his lips.

He blinked a few times before what he was looking at finally registered in his mind.

Emerald. He was the king of Emerald.

"I think I'll be alright," the man said with a laugh.

The prince's cheeks turned pink. How embarrassing, speaking to a king that way. And worse, being laughed at for it. Though there seemed to be no malice behind his amused tone, the last thing he wanted was to be looked down on.

"Oh. King Clayton Alexander. My apologies, I didn't know-"

"Hey," he was cut off, "Don't worry about it. I assume you're of Diamond origins?"

Though George couldn't see behind the mask, he could assume that this was deduced from his light blue attire.

The King now began plucking the thorns from the stem, very gingerly, his attention still trained on George. His calloused fingers had been too rough for the edges to pierce before, so flicking off the sharp spikes were no problem for him.

"I am. George Davidson, Prince of Diamond. It's lovely to meet you, your highness."

King Clayton tilted his head slightly, examining him for a few moments longer. He let out a quiet hum of contemplation.

"George. A beautiful name for a beautiful prince. Lovely to meet you too. And please, call me Dream. That's my name."

The compliment made the young man blush. He looked away shyly, letting out a nervous laugh.

The rose had been de-thorned by now, the gold stem no longer littered with little spikes. The shallow indentations where they had been ripped off were slightly paler than the rest of the thorns, but under the moonlight, it looked all the same.

"Thank you. My apologies, King Dream, I'll refer to you as such from now on."

Dream focused his attention up to the stars, where George had been staring before. The prince found himself doing the same, adjusting to the company.

"How are you finding the party, Prince George?"

"Wonderful so far." He was only half-lying. "The wine is truly amazing."

"Thank you. I picked that one out myself, I'm glad it was to your taste. Cost a pretty penny."

"It was. And the architecture here is breathtaking," he added, looking over at the man.

"Of course it is. It was crafted with the best materials in the country. We're the most powerful

kingdom in the continent, we have to look the part," Dream said with a small grin.

George had to stop himself from cringing in distaste. There was a fine line between confidence and arrogance, and Dream had ruined it, walking through it and kicking the sand it was drawn in.

He could think of about ten other ways that the other nations held superiority over Emerald. The size of Diorite's territory, harvest yield of Lapis' bountiful crops, lowest crime rate. The list goes on. Although Emerald was the wealthiest kingdom on the continent, whether or not it was the most powerful was debatable.

The other aristocrats had a pattern of talking down on him, in their own subtle ways. Moreover, a lot of it was covert; hidden between the lines of formalities, trusting him to pick up on them and hoping for him to take the comments to heart. But they hadn't gloated about their own kingdoms, spoken of how much richer they were to Diamond, how much stronger. It was a known fact; Diamond wasn't the richest rook in the game. Dream's approach appeared to be far more grating.

"Right..."

They were quiet for a few moments. It wasn't quite tense, but George wasn't exactly relaxed either. He found himself staring at the roses that climbed the barrier, watching the way they shimmered and curved over one another. Hundreds of ruby red blooms and carats of golden stems.

"You were looking at the stars, but I'm gonna take a wild guess and say that they're not the reason you're here."

This took him by surprise.

"Pardon me?"

"You're here." Dream twirled the rose between his fingers. "You're out here, alone, because you wanted a break. Why is that?"

"I just needed a breather."

"Was it getting too much?"

"Sorry?" George responded, affronted.

Dream held the rose up higher, letting the moonlight hit it at all the right angles as he examined his work. He ran his thumb over the stem, satisfied with how smooth it felt under his thumb given the fact that it was previously littered with thorns.

"The ball. The superficial formalities, the boot-licking social climbers. It can get overwhelming."

"I hope you're not underestimating me. I can hold my own just fine."

"Not at all. Everyone needs a break sometimes."

Dream slid closer, resting an arm on the backrest of the stone seat. George could feel the warmth of his presence near him, their knees just barely touching. His breath caught in his throat and he didn't look up at the man, even though he really wanted to. Dream leaned in closer, his breath just barely grazing George's ear and his voice barely a whisper with promises of something he couldn't quite place.

"I'm out here too, aren't I?"

And with that, George turned his head, face-to-face with the masked individual, only inches apart. Dream was almost leaning forward, taunting, teasing. George felt crowded in, but it didn't feel like a threat. And suddenly, the plate that had accumulated various emotions throughout the night spilt over, leaving his mind blank and vision fuzzy.

"I suppose so."

A smirk fell on Dream's lips and he reached down to take hold of George's smaller hand. He paused, giving the man a chance to pull away. When he didn't, he placed the stem of the rose in the palm of his hand and carefully closed George's fingers around it. The sensation snapped the smaller man out of it, looking down at the rose he was given. It was gorgeous, freshly bloomed. Only then did George lean back slightly, needing a moment to collect his thoughts and emotions.

Dream was cocky. He was arrogant, clearly felt superior as a human being, and George should stay away from him. But there he was, spinning George, twirling him between his fingers like the rose he previously held. How could a man with only half his face exposed be so magnetic?

Noticing how flustered the brunette was, Dream let out a laugh. George couldn't tell if he was being condescended or if he was just assuming the worst. Regardless, he stood up from his seat, holding the rose in confusion and indignance.

"I hope we'll meet again soon, Prince George."

Chapter End Notes

It took two whole weeks to write this chapter because I'm slow and brain go brrr

The Weight Of A Crown

Chapter Summary

George visits the town square, and leaves with a newfound sense of duty to his people. He spends some time with a guest who isn't so different from himself after all.

Chapter Notes

This entire chapter takes place about a week before the ball.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The clouds were thick that day. They loomed overhead, not quite thick enough to yield rain, but enough to scatter the rays of sun before they could hit the dirt roads and cobble paths. On such a day, the chill in the air was especially harsh. George had a modest coat draped over his shoulders, his plain white tunic not doing much to shield him from the weather.

"George, are you sure today's a good day to be out and about?"

The advisor held a notepad in his hands, spinning the fountain pen between his fingers.

"Oh, come on, Sapnap. Who's to say any other day this autumn would be quite as lovely? It's not raining, nor is it too sunny."

Nick (or, 'Sapnap', as his prince had nicknamed him fondly) clicked his tongue in disapproval, but decided not to press the matter. He knew better than to interrupt George's momentum on a good day.

"We don't have long before we need to return to greet the guests, though. Let's hurry on, then, yeah?" George quickened his pace a little with a warm smile, forcing Sapnap to catch up.

They made their way to the town square, and the prince was immediately swarmed with a small crowd of villagers. A couple of cheers sounded as they got to see their prince. George smiled at them all gratefully. With Sapnap by his side taking down notes, he began speaking with some of his people. The crowd had somewhat dissipated a couple minutes in, allowing George to work on his objective.

He needed to survey his people.

As he was growing older, George felt that he should be preparing to take the throne at any moment. He was an adult now, and should anything happen to cause a premature coronation, he can't be left in the dark. Sure, Nick was a lovely advisor, but he wasn't all too much older than him and they both had a lot to learn. Because of this, he decided to take his friend on this journey to the heart of the village instead of any other among the court.

As he spoke with a sweet tongue and warm hands, different citizens opened up to him. Meanwhile,

Sapnap was scribbling down the important bits of what was said, what was working and what wasn't. Of course, there was a sector of the court focused on this exact task, but hearing a watered down or summarised version of the situation just felt insufficient. These were real families with real struggles. Although George trusted his court to do their best in representing the interests of the people, he needed to be more involved.

"The rations distributed were so incredibly helpful. They helped us get by. But with the nights getting colder...The crops, your highness. They don't... the season hasn't been particularly forgiving, and with winter approaching, we worry-"

George carefully clasps the woman's shaking hands in his own, giving a gentle squeeze of assurance. His brows were knitted in concern. She was close to tears and while he knew harvest was worryingly sparse, seeing the effects on his people broke his heart.

"Of course. We'll look into more distributions as soon as we can. My sincere apologies for not having done more to ease your burdens. Is there any way I can help in a way that's more sustainable?"

The woman smiled sadly.

"Your highness. You can't change the weather."

George felt his stomach sink.

Soon enough, he was to take the throne. Seeing his people suffering like this, living from ration to ration, it pained him. The soil has grown dry and less fertile over the years, the summers too hot and the winters too cold. But George refused to believe that nothing could be done.

He thanked the woman for her time and turned to Sapnap, skimming through his notes as they discussed what was collated.

As they were preoccupied, a young boy, no older than 6 came by, giving a small bow a few feet from them. Seeing this from the corner of their eyes, they looked up and George leaned forward with a warm smile. The child approached the bench, holding something in his small hands.

"Prince George, thank you for helping us with food," the young boy spoke, causing George's heart to melt.

"Of course. My parents are the ones planning all that for now, but I'll be taking over by the time you're my age, you know."

George glanced behind the little boy to where a humble coal miner stood. The man had a tired smile on his face, and he was leaning against the stone wall of a shop.

"Daddy said to give this to you."

The little boy held out a decently sized diamond. It wasn't cut the best, but it was brilliant and tinted blue. George picked it up very gingerly, examining it with awe.

"A diamond? Are you sure, young lad? This seems pretty expensive, I wouldn't want to take something so precious from you."

"We have more at home, nobody wants them so I play with them sometimes. Daddy said this one was too pretty and big to play with, and now he says he wants to give it to you."

George looked back over the kid's shoulders at the man and flashed a grateful smile. He gave an acknowledging nod of his head before pushing off from the wall and heading into the shop behind him.

"Thank you very much. I'm honored to have it, and I promise I'll keep it safe. Give your father my thanks as well, can you do that for me?"

"Of course! He'll be so happy when I tell him!"

He watched the young boy scamper away excitedly after his father, taking his hand once he's caught up. Every second step, the young boy would jump over a stone on the dirt ground. Seeing his friend look so deep in thought, Sapnap reached out and gave George a gentle squeeze on his shoulder, who looked up at him with an appreciative smile.

"What's on your mind, Gogy?" Sapnap asked, with his voice lowered so nobody else would catch him speaking so informally with the Prince.

"Nothing, I just... All the diamonds in the land and nobody to enjoy them. Look at this. It's beautiful."

Sapnap rolled the diamond around in his palm carefully, watching the way the sun shone on the gem. The diamond was indeed large and easy on the eyes. The light wasn't yet perfectly refracted, but that was a flaw in the cut, not a flaw in the diamond itself.

"Woah. Yeah. Bit of reshaping, this could probably be on a crown or heirloom."

"Mhm..."

Seeing how George slipped back into his head, he sighed. The advisor nudged him with his shoulder, snapping him out of it and making him look up, slightly startled.

"Hey. Let's get out of here, yeah? Lunch should be ready around now," he urged the prince, with an encouraging smile on his face.

"Yeah."

"I think we should grow closer to our allies."

His father looked up at him intently. His brows furrowed in intrigue and confusion, but he showed no traces of disagreement.

"Of course. We're trying our best, we always are. I'm glad to see you being more proactive in your involvement with politics. Why the sudden thought?"

"The survey today with S- Advisor Nick. The villages. They need help, help that we cannot provide sustainably. I think we need allies who can help before we fall into a famine."

"George, darling, our friendship isn't transactional," the Queen's gentle voice chimed, "You don't cut corners when shaping a Diamond."

"I understand that we don't want to 'use' others, to ask for handouts for the sake of it. But mother,

we have so much to offer. Our cloth is of renowned quality, our clams produce the most beautiful of pearls, and our mines pull diamonds almost as quickly as they pull coal. We could do so much more with trade if we were to just tap into our resources. It hardly counts as 'cutting corners'."

There was a contemplative silence as the king and queen looked at one another with expressions George couldn't read.

"What stories did you hear from the townspeople?"

"The soil. Its fertility seems to be declining still. Citizens are living off the rations, the crops are barely giving them enough to feed themselves. And with winter coming, with no significantly lucky harvests on the horizon, I worry it would cause a strain on our reserves that will make the coming years difficult to manage. We may be helping now, but how long can we do this for?"

"George..."

George pulled out the diamond from his pocket.

"This was given to me today by a little boy. His parents had found it in the mines, along with other gems, but even the upper class within our walls seem to be too preoccupied to purchase luxuries. It hasn't even been cut yet. They dig the coal and leave the gems they find because *nobody can afford* the beauties we can produce."

"Truth be told, you aren't alone in your sentiments, my son." The king spoke finally, hands folded and tucked under his nose. "The people deserve more. But with the reputation we hold, not a lot of countries will find an incentive for trade deals. Have you considered how it could impact our standing with Redstone, for example? Their cloth is known to be of the highest quality one can import, opening ours to trade could be detrimental to our pursuit for an amicable relationship."

George was quiet for a moment. It was his turn to think of a rebuttal. The king continued.

"We could so easily butter up the aristocrats. Befriend princes, queens, barons. But is that who we want to be? Friends rooted in transactional foundations?"

"Transactional does not need to mean superficial."

The silence spoke volumes. George was stepping up to the podium, and his parents were accepting his input as a competent adult. He had made a completely valid point, it was only a matter of ironing out the details and process with his parents. It felt as though he was finally a leader as well. They were working as a team, sharing perspectives and ideas and coming to a stable centre which would be the most beneficial to their people.

The queen was the first to speak up.

"Okay... Okay. One step at a time. How would you suggest we go about this?"

"The ball in Emerald next week. I was hesitant before, but I would like to attend."

"That's very reasonable. Perhaps we've sheltered you too much, hidden you from the eyes of the nobility for too long. But your fresh face offers a clean slate and your first impression could be a useful tool," the king agreed, resting his head against his fingertips.

George smiled.

"Of course. I am more than prepared. Especially being an adult entering the scene, others will be

more inclined to treat me with respect and view me maturely.”

The queen hummed in agreement, smiling back at her son.

“We can discuss preparations another day, maybe get that diamond cut right to wear on your suit. You are dismissed, please prepare yourself for guests. The Watsons of Gold are arriving any minute now, and Prince Wilbur has requested to paint in our throne room. Perhaps you could keep him company?”

It's strange how little we really hear silence in our lives. Something's always happening, someone's always talking, and we hardly get to listen to the world around us. Really listen. Your quiet breaths. The gentle thudding of your heart. The stray thoughts lingering on your mind; Not the ones that are overwhelming, but the ones that are always present in the background, rarely addressed.

And George was listening.

"Do you ever wonder how you could ever take the throne?"

The words came out rather strained. George had been sitting on these words for a while now as they painted in silence. He wasn't too sure how it would be taken, and when he finally spit it out, he didn't look up from his work. Perhaps he worried about what he'd see in Wilbur's eyes. Judgement? Amusement? Whatever it was, it wasn't worth the risk. His ego was fragile enough, his walls lowered as the hours spent together over the past few months picked at his facade.

"What d'you mean?" Wilbur paused his work and looked over at George curiously.

"Like... Whether you could step up to the plate? Fulfil expectations?"

"What, when it comes to the crown? We Watsons tend to plan way too far ahead. Dad has a book of plans for the next two decades, and when it's my turn, I won't have to start from scratch."

George didn't reply, staring at the canvas in front of him. Wilbur noticed the deliberate lack of eye contact, deciding to focus his eyes on his own canvas as he worked.

"I hear you thinking. What's goin' on in that little noggin of yours?" Wilbur re-crossed his legs, leaning forward slightly as he worked on a more detailed section.

"I guess I'm just worried. So much is hovering over me and knowing that someday, alone, it'll all be in my hands. I'm not expecting it so soon, but it's still there. A distant thought that comes back every now and again."

"George, you're a smart young man. Don't underestimate yourself. The only real expectations you need to live up to are your people, not your own."

Perhaps Wilbur was right. He was putting too much pressure on himself to be perfect. He needed to do right by his people, but he couldn't expect to fix everything in an instant. The Diamond citizens were struggling, but they were somewhat content. All he needed to do was pinpoint the shortcomings and figure out how to fix it. And for now, he had his parents to guide him through it.

“You didn't answer the question.”

"Of course I do. I think about it sometimes, all the responsibilities. I'll have to choose a wife at some point, someone who's capable of being a queen. I'll have to be a good example for my little brother. I have to be a good king eventually. But I've lived a good few years to learn about how things work, and I know that when the time comes for me to step up, I'll be ready. Even if I'm not, I will be. Y'know?"

"You speak as though you're that much older than me," George said, cracking a smile.

"Is that *teasing* I hear? Why, I suggest you start respecting your elders, Georgie boy," Wilbur quipped back with feign offence, drawing a laugh from him.

"Of course, *Prince Soot*, my apologies."

"Y'know, only my friends call me by my middle name like that."

George's smile faded slightly and he examined Wilbur's face to decide if he was joking or not and see if he had overstepped there. He couldn't tell.

"You didn't correct me," the younger one noted.

"I didn't."

Another comfortable silence fell over them as they adjusted to the weight of a new label. A weight that was comforting, like resting a chin on one's head or shoulder, or a hand placed over one's own. 'Friends'.

The air was crisper in autumn. Perhaps a result of the red and fiery orange leaves littering the paths. Usually, once winter rolls around, the air feels smoother - biting and cold, but hushed. But now, George appreciated how it felt filling his lungs, dragging out each exhale like a cigar by the fireplace.

"How's yours coming along?" Wilbur asked quietly.

Their conversations were soft and tentative, both careful not to ruin the peacefulness of the moment. George finished another careful stroke of his brush before speaking.

"It's alright. Not the most accurate since I'm going by memory, but it's coming together."

He received a hum in response, either in agreement or acknowledgement. The curly haired prince glanced over at George every now and then. When they caught eyes, George offered a small smile, which Wilbur returned.

"Are you finally going to tell me what you're painting?"

"You'll see it soon enough. I'm almost done, anyway," Wilbur chided with a click of his tongue.

Another few moments passed.

"You know, it's always nice visiting."

"Why's that? You've only been here a handful of times, if even."

"It's peaceful here. Just feels.... Nice."

"It's not because I'm here?"

"I didn't want to flatter you, but I guess I've been backed into a corner here," Wilbur retorted, causing George to laugh. "But really, it's probably because there's a lot less going on here. It's less hectic. It's just calmer, I reckon. Unless Tommy's in the room."

"I guess this is where I admit I feel the same. It's nice when you come over. It's nice to have someone who I can talk to about things like this without feeling ungrateful or pompous or whatever. You're easy to trust. Your heart suits the kingdom, Wilbur - Solid gold."

"Well, I'm glad you think so. Y'know, you're always welcome to visit us in Gold. It's especially lovely in the winter."

"I appreciate that. I'll take you up on that someday."

Wilbur finally placed his brush into the little cup, leaning back to admire his work. He ran his fingers along the section of the painting that he'd done early on, having mostly dried by now. He made a noise of approval, looking over at George.

"It appears I'm done. Just in time, too. I think it's almost time for supper."

"Probably. I hear Tommy finishing up in the field, he must be coming back for food," George pointed out, and they shared a laugh.

"Sounds like Tommy, alright."

George set his brush in his own holder, smiling at his own handiwork. A creek, with a gentle river flowing. The proportions were slightly unrealistic, but it appeared stylistic enough to be passable. The moss on the rocks was the most impressive, looking slippery and perfectly textured. The light filtering through the leaves reflected across the water, highlighting the ripples in it.

"That is breathtaking," Wilbur noted, looking at it in awe. George barely heard him slide his chair over to look.

"Thank you. I used to go there with Sapnap when I was younger. A cosy nook, untouched by anyone but us. Well, we probably weren't the first ones there, but it was nice to pretend."

"I like that. It's personal, it feels calm. Fitting of a place in Diamond."

"Now yours, come on. Don't think I've forgotten."

Wilbur smiled, standing up and walking to his own canvas. George carefully lifted his seat back and walked around to be able to view the masterpiece.

"Alright, alright. Take a gander. Tell me what you think."

George felt the air punched out of his lungs, and his jaw dropped.

It was him. A portrait of George with a relaxed, thoughtful expression on his face. Atop his head sat the silver diadem he donned, except it was littered with gems of different colours. The pink in his cheeks were so faint, yet noticeable, and the tunic he had on had been replaced with a more formal costume.

The most striking part of the painting was how recognisable it was without being hyper realistic. You could still see where each stroke starts and stops, and George was understandably in awe.

"Wilbur..."

"It's for you. I wasn't going to carry it home, anyway, and it would probably find a more fitting home here with the muse."

Wilbur had begun putting the oil paints away as he explained. George struggled to find the words to say. So much thought and effort into a work inspired by himself, and it was his to keep and remember.

"Thank you. I really do love it, I'll treasure it for as long as I live," George promised, eyes crinkling as he smiled.

And with that, they silently headed to the dining hall together, the warmth of a finally blooming friendship draped over them like a blanket tethering them together.

Chapter End Notes

This took quicker than expected tbh, I was prepared for 2 week intervals. Starting a novel around the beginning of a semester might not have been the smartest on my part.

But this is a bit of a shorter chapter, do forgive me! I'll try to see if I can make the next one longer. Again, feedback is much appreciated, every single comment makes me excited haha

Sitting Pretty

Chapter Summary

George receives a few letters, and one from someone he did(n't) want to hear from, to which Sapnap has to assure him that this isn't a downwards slope into being some sort of trophy husband.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The chill of the early breeze gnawed at his shoulders once again when he woke up. Rubbing at his bare chest, he squinted at the sun that filtered through the slit in the white and silver curtains. It was his usual waking hours, but as the mornings got colder, he found himself more and more reluctant to leave the warmth and safety of his silken covers. Still, he managed to drag himself out, slipping on a tunic and shirt to make his way downstairs.

"It appears your presence at the ball was well-received," George's mother said with a smile when he sat down for breakfast two mornings after his 'royal debut'.

The king and queen sat at the dining table, enjoying the scrumptious meal that was laid out. In the centre of the dining table sat a platter of toast and eggs. A servant was tidying up in the kitchen, the hushed flow of the tap distantly audible, but it was rather peaceful. The tall windows were enough to light up the room, saving them candles that they would usually use in the more hidden parts of the castle. The blue tablecloth had just been washed, George could tell from how bright the silver in the tassels and trims were.

As usual, his parents were reading the letters they had received. This happens often after they attend large events; a day would be spent writing procedural letters to show good relations, and the day after would be when they were delivered. Most were returns from the royals they had mingled with at the ball, no doubt filled with empty pleasantries and false promises to visit and 'keep in touch'. (Clearly disingenuous, since other than the Watsons of Gold, they hadn't had an actual visitor in years.) But something was definitely different this time around, evident by the gleam in his father's eye when he glanced up from one of the handfuls of letters laid out on the table.

The young man lit up instantly at the praise, curiously looking between his parents to figure out why they seemed so chirpy. Had a queen mentioned him in their letter? Perhaps the first impression that he sought to frame himself in was set in stone, impactful enough to warrant a feature. He had just woken up minutes prior, barely having much time to freshen up before heading down, but the promise of good news definitely had him awake and alert.

"Why's that?" He asked, reaching for his coffee.

"You have a few letters addressed to *you* specifically, written by kings and queens," his father said with a proud smile, sliding a few wax-sealed letters his way. "You've been quite the topic of conversation in some of the letters we received, as well."

George picked one of them up, the envelope that was an orange-tinted shade, and ran his finger along the grains of the deep red wax. The signature stamp of Redstone, with its deliberately

fragmented lines circling a small ruby in the centre of where the metal had pressed into the drying lacquer. It was dripping with sophistication, regality, professionalism, and it made the reality of his role as a successor feel all the more present on his shoulders. Yet, it didn't feel like a burden.

Carefully prying open the envelope, he began to read.

Prince George Henry Davidson II,

What an honour it was to meet you on the evening of Emerald's Royal Ball.

It's lovely to see a prince who can hold his own at his first ball, especially from a humble country such as your own. I must say, your debut was a rather surprising one, but the energy I picked up from being in your presence was impressive, to say the least. A well-read man indeed.

You were speaking with the Prince of Gold, I noticed. I do hope your impression of me isn't painted one way or another, Wilbur and I have a complicated relationship. He is a lovely young lad, but I know he doesn't think the best of me. I do hope this won't be a crease in our relations moving forward.

I write to say I look forward to seeing you again. With how hurried you were to meet everyone, I feel we didn't get the chance to discuss literary works further. I hear diorite is looking to host a gathering in the Spring. Let's speak then?

Best regards,

King Eret Alastair Earl-Lockhart.

Redstone

The neat signature on the bottom tied the letter together nicely, and George folded it with a smile. His father looked back at him expectantly over his cup of coffee, and George gave him a subtle nod - a silent assurance that it was *very* good news. He looked at the second envelope in front of him, one made of a pale, light grey paper.

"The young messenger boy who sent the second one said the king had written it for your eyes only," his father stated, though his tone was noticeably more tentative this time.

The stamp of Emerald was carefully etched into the seal, whose wax formed a perfect circle. Whoever sealed it had done so with a steady and calculated hand, pouring just the right amount

that it didn't spill over or leave behind the usual bloated ring around the design. A lot of care was put into this one. And knowing who had written it made both his stomach sink and flutter all at the same time.

His parents seemed just and cautious, though George could assume that it wasn't for the same reasons.

"I... suppose I'll read this in my quarters later, in that case"

His father gave a nod, and they continued their meal.

"Philza sent a letter too," the Queen noted, setting her tea down.

"King Watson! Lovely, what did he say?" George asked, leaning forward in his seat attentively.

"You can call him Phil, don't worry," his father mumbled with a teasing grin. He had finished his fourth slice of toast by now, and was pretty content.

"Philza. Right, I know, but it feels strange not including his title."

"I could call you Prince Davidson, if it suits you better."

"Dad, please don't-," George pleaded with a laugh before his mother shushed him.

"Boys," his mother scolded light-heartedly, "Enough bickering, save it for lessons later. As I was saying, Phil just wanted to say that Wilbur would like you to visit next week."

George lit up once again at the mention of his friend. It had only been two days, but he didn't get a chance to speak to him before he left. The Golds had left a little early, due to the youngest son's restlessness tiring him out quicker than most. He made a mental note to thank him again, and ask him if he ever asked that girl for a dance.

"Of course. Wilbur was a great help, I'd love to see him again soon."

"He is a lovely young lad. That painting he did for you was absolutely fantastic. He really is talented," she added, smiling appreciatively at the servant who refilled her tea for her.

George set his cup down, a quiet *No, thank you* as he was offered a top-up as well.

"I should see to reading the letter by Emerald," he trailed off, picking up the still-sealed envelope.

The King gave a curt nod, dismissing him from the table. He departed without another word, both dreading and itching to read it.

Dear Prince George Henry Davidson II,

Congratulations! I heard many wonderful things about you among the nobles. For your first event, your performance was impressive. Even Andesite had good things to say, and you know how... difficult they can be to please.

It really is a shame that our time together was cut short. I never had the chance to introduce myself properly. Being only a nation or two apart, I recognise the importance of a harmonious relationship between us. Although I admit, for a man such as yourself, your sweetness may be influencing my desire to get to know you more than our geographical distance.

And I would love to get to know you, George. You're captivating, and those few minutes we shared were far more riveting than the rest of the evening. You intrigue me.

For you, I would like to extend an invite to Emerald once again. Come see what our garden looks like uncovered from the blanket of the night. I believe you'll find it to be all the more enchanting. You are also welcome to stay till morning - I know the journey must be exhausting, and to endure it twice in a single day must be a little much. A guest room is always ready for you. By the morning you receive this, dinner would already be in the making. I do hope you will do me the pleasure of sharing it with you.

I look forward to either your word or your presence.

Sincerely,

Dream

Emerald

"Oh come on. He seems lovely!" Nick said hopefully, nudging him gently.

He leaned over George's shoulder to continue reading the letter. The prince at his desk, and when his advisor heard of the letter, he came just in time to watch the aftermath of it. He stood behind the seated prince as he read through the 'offensive' sheet in front of him.

"Lovely? This letter is *oozing* pretentiousness! You can feel the *superiority* complex!"

"I think you're overreacting," Sapnap pointed out with an amused look on his face. "Confirmation bias to support your first impression. He even wants to get to know you."

George let out a groan, folding the letter and shoving it in the envelope once again.

"Sap, you know who we're talking about here, right?"

"Well, yeah. King of Emerald, the one without a face."

"The one who won a war two summers ago," George corrected, as though it was a piece of information that had been withheld from Sapnap.

He almost expected surprise, some sort of epiphany from him maybe that would bring him to the

same conclusion as the prince. Unfortunately for George, as an Advisor, it was literally part of Sapnap's job to know external matters, so the epiphany never came.

"A war that he didn't start, nor did he wish to continue."

"Whatever! Bottom line is, he's scary, and cocky, and I don't like him."

George had his arms crossed childishly; A side of him only Sapnap had the misfortune of seeing. (He wasn't about to let his poise facade fall in front of just *anybody*.) The prince didn't look up at Nick, who had leaned his calloused hands on the smaller man's shoulders at this point.

"Gogy, you know that Clayton-"

"Dream," he interrupted quietly.

Nick paused.

"Huh?"

"He said his name was Dream. He prefers that."

Nick furrowed his brows in confusion. He ducked his head down to lean beside George again, taking a brief glance. His suspicions were confirmed, as he caught sight of the pink tint in his cheeks.

Sapnap had only seen his friend blush like that a handful of times, and one of those times was when he had first gotten home from the ball and was talking about how it went. The prince was animated, telling his experiences with certain aristocrats. When he had shared about meeting the host, he explained what happened but he seemed embarrassed about it, which he had initially brushed off as embarrassment from being undermined, but now he knew better.

In an effort to not embarrass his friend further, he didn't mention it, but he took note.

"You know that Dream and his kingdom are rich. Filthy rich, isn't that what you wanted to do when you went to the ball? Connections in high places?"

George knew Sapnap was right. He knew that Emerald was a *fantastic* ally, and he was *absolutely* punching much farther than he had expected. But he wasn't convinced that it was the right thing to do. Wouldn't it be downplaying his entire nation if he was willing to comply with a stranger just because he had money? Wouldn't that make him seem powerless?

Sapnap pushed himself to stand upright again, George groaning at the press in his shoulders. He heard shuffling as his friend walked across the room. He looked over his shoulder curiously. "Sap, what are you doing?" He asked, watching the man look through his closet.

He didn't respond. Instead, as a few moments passed, he returned from the closet with a familiar suit in hand, hung from a hanger, and laid it on the bed gently. George felt guilt set in and he took a look at the blue costume from two nights ago. The diamond was still sitting in the middle, brilliant as ever. George stood up from his seat to move closer and run his fingers along the shining gem, remembering the little child that looked up at him with bright, innocent eyes. He chewed on his lip gently, contemplating the perspective he was viewing the situation with. Perhaps it was selfish of him to deny the opportunity.

"Listen, as your advisor? I'm sorry you have to go through this, but I think it's for the best. Emerald is a strong ally to have, so I urge you to *try* to see where this goes, for the kingdom."

"And as my friend?" He mumbled.

"As your friend, I think you need to suck it up and give him a chance. I've never seen you blush as hard as you did talking about the balcony that night. What have you got to lose?"

The prince was silent for a moment, thinking over that option. The bed creaked quietly under him as he sat down. He hesitated, thinking through his thoughts before replying with a croak.

"My dignity?"

"George," the advisor chastised.

"No, I'm serious!" He insisted, taking a pleading tone. "What does he want from me? What if I go there and he expects something of me?"

"Then you have a carriage downstairs to take you home."

"Sap, I don't want to go there just to be a pretty face at the table," he said quietly, brows furrowed.

Sapnap slowly sat down next to him and rested his hand on George's shoulder sympathetically. He could only imagine what it was like to be a trophy piece, or to be patronized in such a way. But George was jumping to conclusions, without substantial evidence that Dream was just that shallow. He wanted to get to know George, after all.

"You're too cool of a dude for anyone to overlook, no matter how much of a hot piece of ass you are," Sapnap consoled, ruffling his hair to make the prince's face scrunch up in displeasure and amusement.

Techno growled as he pushed himself up off the ground, charging at Dream with a cry. He wasn't as tall as the blonde, but he was much broader, thicker with muscle and flesh. He dodged two swings of the man's sword before making an attack. He swung the axe towards the metal chestpiece, intending to knock him back. However, with a cunning step to the side, Dream managed to evade it.

"Nice try," Dream rasped out through his teeth as the pig-masked man lurched forward with momentum, the provocation fueling his opponent's determination.

Techno swung around before Dream could take advantage of his blindspot. He body-slammed the taller man, and Dream was caught off guard this time. The clatter of metal could be heard as he was flung a few steps back. The wind was knocked out of him, and he let out a groan. For a moment, Techno thought he had the upper hand. He was standing in front of Dream, who was winded and on the ground. The space between them closed quickly as the man charged at his stunned opponent, and Techno used this opportunity to raise his axe once again, his centre of gravity shifted back as he prepared to strike.

Dream used this opportunity to swipe his foot under the pink-haired opponent's leg, causing him to tumble to the ground with a clatter and thump. Swiftly, Dream sprung onto his feet, standing over Techno. He pointed his sword at him for a moment, smirking at him. The smile etched into the bone mask was taunting.

“Two for two,” he said, dropping the wooden sword on the ground and offering his hand to the man.

Techno took it gratefully, letting himself be hoisted back onto his feet. He brushed off the dirt that was on his trousers, a mutual respect shared between the two in the form of clashing metal and dirt-stained clothes.

“That one was a draw, I don’t know what you’re on about,” Techno retorted playfully, tossing the wooden practice axe to the side to take a sip from his flask of water.

He redid the end of his braid, seeing as it had loosened up slightly. Dream tipped his mask up a little as he drank from his own, the tip of his nose barely visible while still hiding his upper features. Techno noticed some small freckles dotting it, before catching himself and looking away to respect his privacy.

“Sure thing,” Dream hummed out, wiping his mouth with the back of his gripping gloves before picking his sword up again. “Round three?” He asked with a grin, although he was still panting slightly.

“You sure you don’t need a break, pipsqueak?” Techno asked, readjusting his own mask. He was catching his breath as well.

“Not a chance,” Dream said, the end of his statement being cut off as he charged again.

Techno acted quickly to grab his practice axe and tuck out of the way before the wood came crashing down where his shoulder would have been. Without a hitch, the clashing of wood and metal began again.

Niki watched them from the bench, smiling softly. Her and Tubbo were far enough away from them to not hear their conversation, but the two still had to stay present and alert in case the kings needed anything. Although her eyes followed them, her mind was elsewhere. She seemed to be daydreaming a lot today, Tubbo noticed. He had just gotten back from his delivery, yet her change in behaviour struck him almost immediately. He didn’t bring it up the first hour they were together, but it was getting a little much. The small boy nudged her gently, snapping her out of it. She looked down at him with a hum of confusion, which he mimicked back teasingly.

“Where are you?” Tubbo asked, carefully working on the little piece of wood he had been carving. It hadn’t taken shape yet, and he had been hacking at it for a few days now, but it kept him busy.

“Thinking,” the newly pink-haired girl admitted quietly. (They had spoken about it before. *“It’s not gold anymore!” “Yes, that’s how dye works,” she laughed.*)

“Well, go on, then. What are you thinking about?” Tubbo urged with a smile, glancing up at her and pausing his whittling.

“I finally met Prince Wilbur that day at the ball,” she began hesitantly, looking down at her hands and fiddling with her fingers shyly. “It feels like someone finally understands me.”

Tubbo gasped, immediately reacting to the new information by bouncing in his seat. While Niki blushed, she didn’t quite react to his eagerness the same way.

“Niki has a crush! Niki has a crush!” He chanted as she shushed him quickly, the scarlet in her cheeks deepening in shade. She was beyond relieved that Dream and Techno were too engrossed in combat to hear.

“Tubbo! Stop that,” she mumbled, grabbing the child and clamping a hand over his mouth, which made him laugh harder.

“You do, though,” he insisted between her fingers, though heeding her wishes and lowering his volume. His tone was just as excited though, and it came out as sort of a whisper-yell. Niki withdrew her hands, her expression morphing back to uncertainty.

“I... I don’t think I do. I don’t know yet how I feel, but I feel as though our connection transcends romance,” she said, pulling away and returned to sitting as they were before. Tubbo tilted his head slightly in confusion.

“What do you mean?”

“I like him as more than a casual friend, but I also know that this bond is too special, too different from a romance. That would simply corrupt it.”

“I’m... not sure I understand, but I respect that. I’m glad you finally met him, though! Wilbur’s so nice, Tommy talks about him all the time. What did you two talk about at the ball?” he asked, sitting up again and fixing his hair.

“He bumped into me, and I heard his voice for the first time, and I told him that it was like the sunset. Later that evening, he asked me to dance.”

Tubbo so badly wanted to ask a million questions, but he kept quiet, letting her share what she wanted to share. She seemed uncomfortable enough as is.

“We hit it off. Joking as though we’d known each other for years. If ever there was a soulmate marked, he would be mine and I want to be his friend. But I worry I might have given him the wrong impression. He invited me to visit him and I just... couldn’t.”

Her hands dropped to her lap, expression softening to a sadder one. She had clearly been thinking about this for a while. This confused the younger boy.

“You couldn’t?”

“I don’t want to give him false hope. I have the feeling he desires something I cannot give, and it would be irresponsible of me to not allow him to move past his feelings just because I want to keep him as a friend. And besides, I have duties to uphold in Obsidian. Where Techno goes, I go. Unless he decides to take a visit to Gold, I won’t get the chance to see him.”

"Not even for a day? Surely you can have a day off."

"Not even for a day. And Techno encourages it, but there's just too much for me to do. Nobody knows the system like I do."

Her lips sat in a thin line, her brows slightly furrowed and staring down a stray blade of grass on the ground as though it had wronged her. She started slipping back into the daydream state she was in before. Tubbo had to nudge her again just so he wouldn't lose her.

“Have you spoken to Techno about it?” Tubbo asked when she looked back over to him, breaking the tense silence.

“No...”

“You should,” he said with a smile.

"I don't know-"

"You know how Techno and Philza are. They're close, basically family! Tommy tells me all the time. I think it's worth a try."

"Tubbo, I have responsibilities, a job to do. I can't compromise them to hang out with someone I've only just met."

"But you think he's your not-romantic soulmate, don't you?"

Niki bit her lip for a moment as she thought the question through.

"*Platonic* is the word you're looking for. And... yes. I think so."

"Then it's worth the effort, if even for a couple of hours a week. And besides, if you explain it to Wilbur, surely he'd still be interested in seeing how great of a friendship you two can have. He's a hopeless romantic, but he's also respectful. He cares about people. And y'know, I'd bet *everything* I have that he'd be more concerned about *your* feelings and thoughts than whether or not you wanna kiss him."

Tubbo made a funny face at that, as if the image made him want to gag. Niki laughed softly. He continued his whittling, and her gaze lifted to watch the two men in the distance spar again. Niki had that faraway look again, but it wasn't as downcast this time. Years of pouring her full commitment to her role, she had never had the chance to make a friend of her own volition. While she regarded Tubbo as a close friend, she also knew that such a friendship was born of convenience, with how often they were together watching over the kings. The hope of exploring a new, great friendship suddenly didn't sound so far away.

"Yeah. Maybe."

Chapter End Notes

Tsundere George let's GO

I hope this one's okay! It's like 4am but I needed to get this out before bed, so please let me know what you think!

What A Mess You've Made

Chapter Summary

And as George's eyes flickered down to the plump pinks, he blinked a few times, stepping back from the man who was spinning him, sending him reeling for more and clawing for less.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The wild autumn flowers were closing up in the fields. The hues of pinks and purples that once littered the terrain were giving way to the green grass they once overshadowed. As George sat alone in the carriage, he had a lot of time to think about what Sapnap had told him. Perhaps he was too rash to decide on the type of person King Dream was. *Was he being unfair?*

It was a difficult situation to navigate, and an unprecedented one at that. When he had spoken to his parents before, they didn't have any experience to properly advise him. He didn't mention the specifics of the letter, but he did let them know that he was very forward. Despite his mother's hesitation to expose him to the Emeralds so early, she seemed pleased to know that Dream had a good impression of her son. She seemed to side with Sapnap, while his father was a tad bit more protective.

"Honey, this is good!"

"We barely know the man, Is he really fit to court my boy?"

"Court-? Dad, you're looking way too far ahead!" George's cheeks were scarlet pink as he spoke.

"Can you blame me? You're my son."

Needless to say, it was once again up to him to make a decision. And that's how he found himself miles from home, the gentle rocking of the carriage doing little to soothe his worries. The words of his loved ones were swimming through his head, but he tried to focus his attention on the sound of hooves against dirt. He watched the way his knee bounced with every pebble on the road. *Bump. Bump.* The plush red seat was comfortable, but not even the finest foam or feather fillings could make the time sitting in the same spot more bearable, or ease the burden of the crown laying over his head.

Obsidian was easy to pass through this time, almost expecting him even. The guard barely asked a few questions before letting the carriage proceed. It was surprising, but as he arrived at the pearly gates of Emerald, he realised why.

An unfamiliar carriage embellished with familiar colours sat at the front of the castle. The coachman was perched on the front, which meant that the visitor had just arrived or was scheduled to leave rather soon. From a distance, George could hear a clatter of metal and wood, and he could

make a guess as to what was going on. As his own carriage came to a stop and he stepped out carefully, the guards greeted him with a slight bow. He was slightly taken aback by this, and he wasn't sure whether this was common practice or not. He took a mental note to ask his parents more about formalities during these visits.

As he approached the grand entrance, he saw through the gaps in the hedges off to the side that shielded the field. A clatter of armour sounded in the air as a blur of pink and silver slammed into the ground with a distant grunt. Squinting, he noticed a foot press onto the chest plate, and a hooded individual had a wooden blade raised in the air in triumph.

Nobody stopped him as he approached the walls of greenery, following along it until he found an opening a few steps ahead. The moment he emerged from the cover of the hedges, heads turned to snap to him. The hooded figure, who he now noticed donned a white mask, had a hand extended to the ground. In one smooth motion, the pinkette, who he now recognised as King Technoblade himself, was lifted from the ground, his free hand readjusting the hog piece covering his eyes. Both kings stared at George for a few moments from their positions in the field.

Before George could say a word, Tubbo got up from his bench, and whatever he was working on before was left forgotten in Niki's lap in a hurry.

"Prince George! His Royal Highness, please, let me show you inside," said the young boy, whom George had never met, with a warm smile on his face.

He followed the boy back through the hedges on the other side of the field, glancing over his shoulder to see Dream looking back at him, gaze lingering on the smaller man. The king seemed as though he wanted to approach, but Techno punched his shoulder lightly, drawing his attention away from him. The young servant boy guided him inside, up a flight or two of stairs to a sitting area he hadn't seen before. It was on the other end of the castle to the ballroom.

"My deepest apologies, I should have been out waiting for you so you wouldn't have to wander on your own," the boy, who George now knew as Tubbo, spoke apologetically.

"No, please, it wasn't a problem. I did arrive earlier than expected, you hold no blame."

A cup of tea was placed in his hand once he had taken a seat, which he sipped slowly. He was left to his own devices soon after. The room was large, with tall windows, similar to the dining room back at home. However, in place of the grand tables and chairs, there was a plush white sofa with golden ridges lining the armrest. It faced the fireplace, where a painting of some mountains hung. It was lovely, and almost familiar. George had never seen such a view, yet he almost felt like he had. It was strange. Regardless, he didn't look too hard.

By the windows, a few round tables crafted from a dark, rich oak were placed, each bracketed by two armchairs of a similar style to the main sofa. That's where George sat that afternoon, a few rays of sunlight casting lines on his face and the saucer placed neatly on the table before him.

It had barely been two minutes before Dream came strolling by the room, a towel over his shoulders. He had removed his hooded top and was left with a form-fitting black inner piece with long sleeves. The collar wrapped up his neck slightly, stopping about halfway. The king saw George sitting there out of the corner of his eye and did a double-take, stepping towards the room.

Dream leaned against the doorframe, offering a smile to the prince. He was still for a moment and George knew that if it weren't for the white mask, he'd see the glint of mischief and smugness behind the tall man's gaze. George felt a lump in his throat. Even without a face, the man had a draw to him.

"I'm really sorry to keep you waiting, my dear prince," he spoke while unravelling the black protective bandages from around and between his knuckles, "I didn't expect you here so early. I'm really glad to see you here today. But I'm afraid I'll have to leave you alone for a little longer while I get changed. Is that okay?"

The prince gave a small nod, after catching himself frozen for a moment too long.

"Of course, take your time."

"Don't miss me too much."

With that, Dream pushed off the doorframe with his foot, disappearing back into the hallways, presumably for a shower.

He hears a mumble of conversation, before a figure appears by the door yet again. This time, though, it was the man he hadn't formally met yet. The self-made king himself, Technoblade, rapping on the frame with his knuckles. The prince moved to stand up immediately.

"May I come in?" The deep voice asked, catching George off guard.

"This isn't my castle, but your company's more than welcome."

This drew a deep chuckle from the large figure. Had it not been for the scene he caught before, he would have thought that Techno was taller than Dream, even. They exchanged a firm handshake, the hulking man towering over him and making him feel tiny, vulnerable. Though despite not being able to see the man's eyes, his company felt inviting. This probably had something to do with their mutual friends, bringing about a sense of kinship. Nonetheless, George accepted the presence wholeheartedly.

"It's nice to finally meet you, Prince George. I've heard many stories. Philza's been talking about his visit to Diamond."

"He's a great man. I've heard stories as well, I didn't expect to meet the leader of Obsidian today after passing through your nation. It truly is an honour to be in your presence."

"Glad to hear it. A friend of Gold is a friend of mine. Sorry you had to see that before, it got a little heated."

"So I noticed. It's quite alright, we'll surely meet again. I wasn't aware you were such good friends with Emerald."

Techno let out a fond laugh as his friend was mentioned.

"Dream's alright. Bit in over his head, but the aura works well for him. Unfortunately, I should be on my way, but I hope we'll get to have a real chat someday soon."

The masked man took a step back, brushing his hair out of his face. The braid was coming loose again.

"Before you go, if I may ask," George began, a playful smile on his face, "Who won?"

Techno paused in his pivot, surprised by the question, but cracking a smile.

"Let's just say we both won in different ways," Techno said with an unreadable tone.

"Oh?"

"He got me on the ground more, sure, but I had him sweating. A fantastic fighter, really, one of the best. But he needed to be knocked down a peg gently enough that it didn't wound him."

Techno had begun a slow walk to the door, speaking over his shoulder every now and then. And while this would usually be a sign of disrespect, George felt comfortable in the loose formalities.

"So you let him win?"

"I wouldn't say that. Rather... winning wasn't my main objective."

George hummed in contemplation, sitting back down in the white armchair and swirling the translucent liquid with his teaspoon.

"Fair enough. Until next time, then."

Techno left without a word, leaving him alone with his thoughts once again. The quiet hum of the wind justling the windows, or the rustling of the bushes beyond filled the silence, and George tried his best to tune those out. Unfortunately, the thoughts swimming in his head were too loud.

The interaction with the men left him far more anxious than he had been before. Perhaps it really hit him then that he was going to be spending the next *day* with the man. The fact that he had no idea what was in store worried him. He barely knew Dream. And while he knew that the man wouldn't do anything to hurt him, he wasn't quite sure what his intentions were.

He saw it going two ways.

One, he treated George with a complete lack of respect, without acknowledging anything about him apart from superficial attributes. In which case, George goes looking for his coachman to take him home. (George had hoped this was the case, so he could leave before the discomfort of a strangers company got unbearable)

Or two, Dream is tolerable. He corrects the image of himself that George had framed in his head. He shows himself to be a nice person, he and George grow a genuine friendship from then on and George leaves the next day with his dignity intact.

These were the two options George had laid out, but if he was being honest with himself, he knew there were a million other ways this could go down. So many nuances, alternative pathways that he was trying so hard to keep his brain from exploring. Realistically, the likelihood of either of the two occurring was rather low. If he kept thinking about it, he was gonna do his head in. So instead, he focused on picking apart the two options he had chosen, not realising his scalding grip on the teacup until a muscle jerk caused a bit to spill over the edge, dripping along the walls and onto his finger.

"Ah..!"

He was quick to put the cup down, grabbing the napkin on the table and wiping his hand dry. The gentle cloth soothed the faint stinging. It really wasn't that hot, but the sensation helped snap him out of his thoughts.

It wasn't long before another silhouette appeared at the door. Still holding onto the cloth, George looked up with wide eyes. Dream approached him, now dressed much more relaxed than before. His hair was just dried, making it look lighter and softer than before. Instead of the damp clusters before, it was fluffy and George definitely did not want to know how it felt between his fingers. Atop it sat his crown, gold and lined with green Emeralds of various sizes.

He wore a loose silken top this time, the top button loose and the sleeves rolled up carefully to the elbows, white and tucked into his black trousers. He was already a good head taller than the prince, but the way the fabric clung to his legs accentuated their length. With a simple and graceful bow, Dream greeted George properly.

"My prince. I'm sorry I kept you waiting," he spoke, before stepping closer. Instead of taking a seat, though, his eyes drifted down to the napkin in his hands, no judgement nor concern in his voice. "Are you alright?"

"I just spilt a bit of the tea, but I'm fine," George assured, looking down at it as well.

His breath hitched when he felt large hands wrap over his, gently removing the cloth and examining his hands carefully. Dream let out a soft 'tsk' as he made sure they were fine. Luckily, there wasn't a mark. The slight redness was already fading. The king ran his thumb along his fingers gingerly, causing George to blush at the sensation. All thoughts left his head for that moment, and he made a conscious decision not to look up at the blonde's face, not knowing what he'd reveal with his own eyes, what emotions he had yet to unpack himself.

"How clumsy. That's alright, doll, I'm glad it wasn't that hot," he said gently, taking note of the lacking eye contact. He withdrew his hands and took a seat in front of George, who's dazed look was giving way for his regular demeanour.

"Just a slight bit. None of it spilt on the couch or tabletop, not to worry."

"That's not why I'd be worried. Can't have you hurting yourself in my castle, now, can we?" Dream stated, leaning forward and resting his hands on the table attentively, fingers interlocked.

"I appreciate the concern. I'm not fragile, though," George reminded him with a polite smile.

"Of course not. But even the most beautiful of gems can be scratched, right?"

The implication of that statement sent another blush to his cheeks. *Beautiful*. He wondered if Dream saw him as any more than that.

"Not a diamond, though," George countered, glancing up at the man with the charming smile he learnt to put up. "I'll be fine."

"I don't doubt that. How was the journey here? Not too boring, I'd hope."

The blonde propped his elbow on the table, resting his chin on his palm as he looked at George. His other hand was resting, extended on the table, his fingers gently drumming the pattern on the centre. George collected himself and glanced up, catching himself unsure where to look. Where he would usually go back and forth between eyes, all there was was a blank mask with an empty smile.

"It was pretty arduous. Travelling alone especially. The carriage gets a little suffocating sometimes," George admitted, glancing down at his cup.

"I'm sure. I get antsy even visiting Obsidian. I don't leave Emerald very often, so I must say I appreciate you coming all this way."

A few responses sat on the tip of his tongue, but he bit them back, offering a tight, calculated smile.

"Of course."

A servant came by as a silence fell over them. Dream sat up again. A platter of pastries was set down, along with a cup for Dream. George's cup was refilled and he thanked them politely. When they were left alone again, George was the first to speak up.

"Do you spar often?" He asked, eyes flickering to the blank smile briefly.

"I didn't, actually. It's hard to find someone who won't hold back. Until I met Techno, and now we practice pretty often. He's fun, and we almost match in skillset," Dream spoke with a grin, glancing out the window. "Almost. Do you fight?"

George let out a soft laugh, remembering King Alastair's words from nights ago.

"I heard that Diamond's King is a weak man. Please don't take offence to this, I ask out of concern. But he has taught you how to fight, right?"

He shook his head, more to rid himself of the words than as a response to the question.

"No, I don't. I've learnt basic self-defence skills, but I avoid offensive techniques,"

Dream hummed, picking up a pastry and examining the thin powder of sugar on the surface. He considered which angle to approach it, before taking a bite. George felt Dream's gaze on him as he waited for the king to swallow.

"And so the diamond remains polished. That's a completely valid way of going about things, I think you're gonna be a great leader," he complimented, "Diamond has a knack for staying out of trouble. I almost envy that."

"I suppose there are perks to it," he agreed, biting his tongue. Dream noticed, sensing that he was holding something back.

"But?"

George was taken aback by this. He wasn't sure if he wanted to be honest. Having his thoughts made known could be dangerous. What would Dream do knowing his fears? He didn't even *like* the man, why would he tell him anything? Yet, his mouth moved before his brain did.

'People look down on us. Underestimate us. Underestimate *me*.'

The king seemed pleased by this response. He smiled slightly, which made George's heart sink. In the split second after spilling this piece of information, his mind raced. *Is he going to laugh? Make fun of the prince? Or maybe use it against him, demean him further in subtle ways?*

"Then they'd be fools. They're not looking close enough. Anyone who spends even a minute with you should be able to see your spark. Your drive to be good. And that should be terrifying."

George was stunned, so he continued. "You know to take advantage of that. 'Appear weak when you are strong, and strong when you are weak'."

Huh, the prince thought. *That's not how I thought this was going to go.*

George grabbed a pastry, staring at it, then out the window, then at Dream's mask.

"Thank you," was all he knew to say.

"So what do you do for fun, then?"

George got into talking about things he enjoyed. Easy, common things. Painting, going for walks,

spending time with his parents. Surprisingly, Dream did more asking than sharing, with his chin resting on his palm and body leaned forward attentively. George pretended not to notice, his legs crossed. And suddenly, a speck of powdered sugar on the tabletop appeared to be the most interesting thing in the room, which was a shame when the king of Emerald sat across from him.

They were back on the balcony. The sun had yet to set, so this time, Dream had brought George to the seat they were in before. He held open the sliding glass doors for the prince, watching as he ran his fingers along the roses lining the barriers. The darkness of the night had made it difficult for him to admire them the other night. They shimmered way more than he had expected. While the moonlight had given them a more ethereal glow, the sunlight revealed their earthly beauty

“It does look different in the day,” George spoke.

As he was busy lifting the buds slightly to see the golden stems hidden beneath, Dream had plucked one that was nearer to the door, and he was picking off the little thorns. His careful fingers ran over them, ensuring the thoroughness. When George turned around and the king held out the rose, it felt like *deja vu*. With careful hands, George took it, saying a quiet breath of thanks. The king took another step closer, causing the shorter of the two to freeze once again. *We’ve been here before*, his subconscious yelled, almost screamed at him. And still, he found himself letting himself go.

The king took a step forward until their chests were inches apart, brushing a strand of brown hair from his forehead. His hidden eyes scanned over George’s face, and his calloused fingers brushing along his cheeks. He didn’t know where to look. Was he supposed to stare into the void circles etched into the white disc? His gaze flickered to his lips briefly. Dream knew his dilemma. He had spoken to Techno about this before, the brute complaining he didn’t know where to look when they faced.

“It’s alright, George,” Dream said quietly, the name rolling off his tongue like he owned it, *and god did he wish he owned it*, “You can look, darlin’.”

A smile curved on his lips, liquid and delicious, the mask hiding the crinkles by his eyes. And as George’s eyes flickered down to the plump pinks, he blinked a few times, stepping back from the man who was spinning him, sending him reeling for more and clawing for less. Dream instantly stepped back when he sensed that the prince wanted distance. WIth the rose in his hand, he blinked a few times more.

“I’m... I should go rest before dinner. The ride here took more of a toll on me than I thought,” he lied, flashing a polite smile that hid his inner conflict. Dream saw through this, and while disappointed that George was putting his fake princely face back on, he respected him enough to not bring it up. He kept his distance (both physically and emotionally) for the time being.

“Of course. I’ll show you to your quarters,” the king said with a polite bow, his tone matching in formality.

And George was left with his thoughts again, this time in a pristine room that wasn’t his own and a body that betrayed him. He stared at the foreign ceiling, white and gold reminding him of home, but light green accents embedded in them reminding him of where he was.

Chapter End Notes

Took more than a week but I worked really hard on this one! I can't wait to share this story with you all, there's so much in store. Also, thank you for 1k hits!! I'm actually stunned, I didn't expect people to like it this much! I'll keep doing my best :D Your comments really, genuinely keep me inspired

What do you like about the story so far? What do you think's going to happen?

Told You So (Listen, next time)

Chapter Summary

'I was right about you, you are an intriguing individual and I want nothing more than to listen to more of your thoughts.'

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dinner was a blur of formalities. Sitting on opposite ends of the table, Dream wasn't quite close enough to the brunette to have an effect on him. George could keep his composure, deflect any excessive complimenting. While the conversation flowed, the vague air of superficiality was ever-present, with how George had his walls up again, making sure the king stayed on the other end of that wall and out of his head. The steak was lovely, though.

When Dream walked him back to his room the final time that night, George didn't have much time to overthink the day's events. He was out like a light.

But when he woke up the next day to the sun barely peeking through the curtains, he rubbed his eyes gently and laid in bed far longer than he usually had the luxury of doing. The morning brought a fresh set of eyes to the memories he held. The gentle tones, the curious questions asked over pastries and tea, and how all that was put to an end when George was back in that balcony. How desperately he tried to unravel himself from between Dream's fingers where he was spun like a quill. He wasn't sure what to make of it.

Should he have given it a bit more time? Dream was earnest in his conversation. Even over dinner, when George sat guarded and alert, with a sharp tongue and ever-present crown, the king had respected his walls. Made no attempt to tear them down forcefully, or prod with questions he didn't wish to answer. Dream kept the conversation surface-level.

Surely, he thought, this was a calculated move. Perhaps he was bored of George already. Being more or less rejected twice probably didn't do too well for his ego. Any wise individual would cut their losses there and move on to find other suitors to romance. For some reason, though, the thought of Dream moving on from him so quickly brought about a feeling he couldn't quite describe or explain. His stomach was tense and his heart making its presence known through slow, steady thumping.

But when there was a gentle knock on his door and a cart of breakfast brought to his room, he was left without answers once again. The servant, whom he had never met before, greeted him with a bow and informed him that the King would be waiting in the library for the rest of the morning until he was ready to see him.

He sat in the room with the cart of food. The sweet maple scent hit his senses the moment he lifted the metal cover. Tucking into the pancakes, he halted mid-bite when he felt something squish between his teeth and the familiar burst of a blueberry met his taste buds. It tasted like home.

Had the king put in that much thought or had it been a coincidence? He couldn't recall an opportunity for Dream to find out about his favourite fruit. As he wracked his brain deeper,

however, he vaguely remembered that amidst the superficial, trivial conversation they had over dinner, he might have maybe mentioned his distaste of specific fruits. Had he mentioned berries?

Goerge cursed his weak memory. Regardless, when he was done eating and getting dressed, he prepared himself to face the man again. Navigating the hallways, he found the door which appeared to be more carefully crafted than the others.

He rapped on it gently with his knuckles before stepping in, his walls lowered.

Dream sat on a dark wood chair, with a velvet seat that was a rich shade of red. His legs were draped over the armrest, and a hand held open a book as the other arm was hidden behind the backrest which he had laid it over. The mask that initially rested by his side had just been pulled over his eyes when he heard the knock.

George caught sight of Dream's more casual kingswear, with a dark green tunic hanging loosely over his collarbones and tucked into a similar pair of black trousers from the day before. The outfit was comfortable, but the quality of cloth and tailoring was a clear indicator of his status, along with the ring of jewels atop his head. This time, though, the sleeves were left unrolled, possibly because of the particularly chilly morning. Dream was ready to shift from his position to one less casual when George raised his hand, palm out. He nodded slowly, looking back down at his book.

"Good morning. I hope you slept well," Dream spoke with a neutral tone, one that walked the line of formal and friendly. George took a seat on the couch nearby, looking at the burning wood in the fireplace.

"I did. The room was to my liking, and the birds are a bit louder here. It was nice to wake up to."

This was a start. He spoke not as Prince Davidson, but as George. Even Dream seemed pleasantly surprised by this, glancing over at the man who didn't meet his eyes.

"That's good, I'm glad you're comfortable. They're set to migrate further north soon, though, which is a shame."

George let out a hum of agreement, leaning back into the plush seat and enjoying the warmth emanating from the fire. It pricked his skin nicely.

"I don't remember if I properly thanked you for dinner. Or breakfast. Did you eat yours here?"

"I did. I wanted to enjoy the fireplace for a bit, and this is where I spend quite a bit of time anyway."

"Surely you weren't reading the whole morning," George poked lightly, with no malice intended or received. Dream laughed quietly.

"You caught me. I learn best through actions, not words on a page," he explained, carefully putting the book down on the table. "I tried to make an exception today."

"Why is that?" Asked the prince, glancing over at the masked man briefly.

"I didn't want to have you wandering the halls again, or have you see me in a field."

Dream stared at the fireplace at well, the two watching the embers glide through the air and dissipate mere seconds later. The pattern repeats.

A fair decision. Seeing Dream's ferocity in battle was an eye-opening experience. He was a

capable king, and the way he maneuvered a sword made him seem equally as adept as a warrior. Being on the receiving end of that battle would be terrifying, the thought alone reminding the prince how important neutrality was for his country. Still, something about the way he moved, weaved gracefully and struck with calculated, forceful hits was almost impossible to look away from. George convinced himself it was the skill that attracted his attention.

"I should be on my way home soon."

Dream nodded, lifting himself from the chair carefully.

"Please allow me to show you to the stables."

"You have another letter."

George lit up at Sapnap's voice, turning around to face him. The advisor walked into the room, setting the envelope on the table. Catching a glimpse of a familiar green wax seal, his face dropped and he let out a groan.

"Before you say anything or even open it, you need to come with me," Sapnap informed matter of factly, making George tilt his head in curiosity. He had a smug look in his eyes, but given the situation, George could guess that this was not one of their usual outings.

"What, is there anything more important than a letter from Emerald?" George mused, grabbing the coat that his advisor had finally convinced him to begin wearing.

"Of course. A *gift* from Emerald," the advisor said with a grin, walking out of the prince's room before he could hear a response.

George jerked in his stride, an involuntary response that was both unpredicted and unwanted. God, he hated the way the faceless man could cause such a visceral reaction, even as he sat in his throne a few kilometres away. The way he blushed, the way he froze, the way his heart stuttered, all due to someone just *mentioning* the king. Nay, mentioning anything *related* to the king.

Perhaps it was the element of this being something new that Dream did. It caught him off guard, and not many people do that to meticulous George. The prince usually had scenarios planned out to the T, he could gauge how interactions could turn out and he analyzed every outcome. The king just subverted that. As the prince began to rationalize, it wasn't Dream that made him react in such a manner, it was his actions which George found trouble reading and finding reasons behind.

But that obviously didn't bode well for the future. They'd only had a meal together after all. George knew nothing about him, and that fact in itself made reading Dream damn near impossible. He didn't know what his goals were, what his intentions were with doing things.

Was he going to react like this every time?

"Your Highness?"

"Right, sorry," George mumbled, catching himself and following in stride behind his advisor.

He didn't know what to expect. But when he stepped through the foyer to see a familiar young

brunette boy, George's eyes furrowed in confusion. Sap had mentioned a gift, not a guest. Upon seeing the two, Tubbo bowed respectfully, stepping forward.

"Prince George, your highness," the boy greeted, eyes crinkling as he smiled.

"Tubbo? Pleasure to see you again. What are you doing here?" George failed to contain the confusion in his voice, but the servant boy did not seem phased by it. He walked towards the grand doors, George following along behind.

"I was instructed to walk you, specifically, through the contents of the carriage. It is quite a sizeable amount, and the lovely king and queen of Diamond agreed to entrust you with this."

George was more confused. What could it be such that it needed his parents to approve? Surely it couldn't be anything bad. Stepping outside and seeing the carriage covered, items pushing against the inside of the sheet walls and the outline of a few wooden pallets and crates. When they circled it to see the uncovered back, George's jaw nearly fell open in shock. Tubbo climbed onto the back of the wagon, resting a hand gently on each crate.

"Three cartons of potatoes, four of bread, these two are preserved cheeses, one of smoked beef," the boy went on, checking the cartons to make sure he was pointing them out accurately. He counted a total of ten crates, all packed to the brim with goods, both perishables and non-perishables.

"I'm speechless... This... This is all from King Dream?"

The boy's smile was radiant and eager.

"Each one was checked personally by him," he said happily, hopping out of the wagon with a quiet thump. He began unloading the cartons, to which the guards nearby stepped in to help.

"I'll be sure to send a letter back soon. This is far more than we could ever ask for. And I extend my thanks to you, especially, setting out so early in the morning to get here on time. Please, let me get my coin pouch."

A bashful blush bloomed on the young man's face, and he let out a polite laugh with his hands raised.

"Your highness, there's really no need."

"I insist. You were so welcoming and helpful yesterday as well, I simply must."

"Please, Prince George. Money isn't an issue for me, honestly. My wages are more than sufficient to provide for me and my parents on their own. Dream takes care of his own, and I have no reason to lie about that. But I sincerely thank you for the offer, you truly are a generous soul," Tubbo spoke, beaming with pride and pure, innocent contentment.

The prince was surprised by two things.

First, it was the informal way he referenced the king he worked for. Speaking to someone of royal blood, Tubbo was more than aware of manners when referring to the prince he was with. Yet, while sticking to formalities when in reference to George and his crown, Tubbo was less careful with mentioning King Dream. The title was dropped so openly. George wondered if this was a norm for servants of Dream, or if it was a careless sign of disrespect. From how highly he spoke of his leader, though, George was pretty sure the latter was not the case.

Secondly, his refusal to accept the tip. Sure, he knew very well that Emerald was a well-off nation, and he would assume the servants were paid a decent amount, but to hear that Tubbo provided for his family with only his income was astonishing. A part of him assumed Dream was one to uphold the class divide to an extent. A harsh assumption, sure, but with the traditions of his predecessors, it was easy to make that connection. Besides, George's perception of Dream was skewed to a more self-centric one anyway. The interaction with the servant boy changed that, though. He considered his next words carefully.

"Regardless, your effort is much appreciated," George decided. "I hope the journey through Gold and Obsidian proved easy at the break of dawn."

"Oh, it was lovely, the meadows are especially dewy around sunrise! Dream allowed me the afternoon off upon delivery, so I'll have the opportunity to visit Prince Tommy in Gold after I take my leave."

"Is that so? That's lovely, I hope you keep him out of trouble," the prince teased lightly as his guards unloaded the last of the crates.

"Try as I might, that's a near impossible task," Tubbo said with a laugh, the two slowly making their way to the front of the wagon with the horses. "I almost forgot, there's one more thing I was asked to hand you personally!"

George raised his eyebrows as Tubbo reached into the compartment of the coachman's seat. From it, he drew a familiar rose on a golden stem, each thorn meticulously picked off in a fashion that he recognised. A wet piece of cotton was tied to the bottom, likely to keep it from wilting along the way. He carefully took it from the boy, examining it carefully.

"That's... interesting. Thank you, again."

"Of course. It was lovely talking to you, but I won't take up any more of your time. Prince Tommy's probably expecting me within the hour, anyway."

"It was nice chatting with you, too. Have a safe journey. I'll likely be over in the evening to talk to Prince Wilbur, hopefully I catch you before you leave."

As George turned to return to his room, he passed Sapnap in the foyer, his friend holding a smug look on his face that spoke the words that didn't need to be uttered.

'I told you so.'

The words were uttered anyway.

Dear Prince George,

Thank you for visiting. Your company was a pleasure, though I would have loved to

have gotten to know you better. I'd like to apologise once again for keeping you waiting. I hadn't expected such an early arrival and honestly, Technoblade and I lost track of time. Keeping a pretty prince wandering for so long was improper of me.

I hope you enjoyed the glimpse of the flowers on the balcony. We left in quite a hurry, so I thought I'd send you one to enjoy on your own terms, in your own time. It should stay bloomed for a few days before wilting, if you wished to keep it for that long. The Dust of Emerald has been sprinkled in the cotton, so it should have sufficient nutrients for a while, so long as the wrapping remains intact.

Along with this letter, I've sent a gift. Our harvests were especially bountiful, with more than needed for the winter. I hope you find use for it so it doesn't go to waste.

Perhaps I should show you around properly the next time you visit. The gardens beyond the fields, the forest, the stream running through it. I don't often appreciate those little things, but since you were here, I find myself thinking about other beautiful sights for you to blend into. I think you'd especially like the river. I was right about you, you are an intriguing individual and I want nothing more than to listen to more of your thoughts.

Until we meet again, my Prince.

Yours sincerely,

Dream :)

Emerald

"I'm so glad you finally came to visit," Wilbur greeted with a broad smile, arms outstretched as the shorter prince arrived. Through the embrace, George rested his head against the other's shoulder.

"As am I. Oh, do I have lots to tell you."

They made their way to Wilbur's study, where two small canvases were prepared. George hadn't visited to paint, per se, but it was a comfortable task to keep their eyes and hands busy as they painted each other with shades of trust and honesty. Wilbur spoke first.

"I haven't spoken to Lady Niki yet. She sent me a letter this morning, but it seemed distant and formal," he said forlornly, brushing a tuft of hair from his eyes. George's heart went out to him.

"What did she say?"

The golden boy bit his lip gently as he applied an especially gentle stroke of paint across his canvas.

"She told me her priorities lay in her duties. Explained how vital her role is in upholding Obsidian's administrations and logistics. She truly is a headstrong woman."

"I'm sorry to hear that," George said gently, dipping his brush in the cup and drying it off with the cloth on the easel.

"It didn't sound like a rejection though, is the thing. She never mentioned that she wanted to stop speaking to me. I don't know what to make of it." The prince carefully dotted a frayed brush on his work, adding light texture to a particular area. "I know when to read signals and social cues to avoid influencing people's choices with unneeded pressure. I've dealt with that before. But with her... I'm not sure."

George hummed, unsure what to say.

"I wish I had any advice that could give you, but I'm just as unsure as you are," he said gently.

Wilbur paused his work, cleaning off his brush so the paint wouldn't dry on it. He looked over at George with a grateful smile, the younger prince looking back at him with a gentle smile back.

"I know. I appreciate the listening ear, I didn't expect you to fix my issues for me." Playfully, Wilbur brushed a clean, wet brush on George's hand. A jarring move for a prince, but a welcomed one from a friend. George let out an amused chuckle as he wiped the wetness from his knuckle. "So, little diamond, you said you had lots to tell me. Go on, then."

George's brush swirled in blue, yellow and white as he tried to find the colour he was searching for. He thought about what to bring up first.

"My first letter was from someone you're supposedly not too fond of," he brought up, causing Wilbur to tilt his head curiously. When recollection clicked in his mind, he nodded, taking a sip of his tea.

"Alastair."

"Yeah. He was just saying hello, saying he regretted how brief our conversation was."

"Probably for the best," Wilbur remarked, causing a light chuckle from George. So rarely had he ever seen a hint of negativity from the taller brunette.

"Care to tell me what that's about?"

"Look, I don't hate the man," Wilbur began, having to set his mug down as his gestures became slightly more animated. "He tries his best, and I'm sure he does. And I know he likely acts without malice. That being said, we do tend to butt heads at meetings. We share opinions on what *should* be done, but he's more of a big picture kind of guy and I disagree with how he does things sometimes."

"Like when you mentioned how he might 'test' me the first time we speak?"

"Exactly that. How did the conversation go? I saw you when we were getting ready to leave," Wilbur said as he picked up his brush again.

"Well, you were right. He said something rather rude but I think I said something he liked to hear. All was amicable from then on."

"That's what I mean. His way of doing things are simply more, for lack of a better term, selfish. He needed to know what to make of you, find out who you are. But in doing so, he pressed a few buttons, crossed some boundaries that would otherwise be a breach of trust. He's done that one too many times with me, and I didn't stand for that."

George nodded slowly as he took in the information. He wasn't sure how he felt there, because although he himself harboured no lingering feelings from the conversation, what Wilbur said was

true. It was disrespectful and he could have obtained information with more tact.

"I'll keep that in mind for future interactions. For now, though, I'd say we're on good terms."

"And I'm happy for you. Honest. You've sowed the seeds for positive interactions in the future with the impressions you left," Wilbur said earnestly, not a hint of distaste at his choice of allies. Despite his personal feelings, George was thankful that his friend wanted the best for him.

"I met with Techno the other day, as well."

"I heard! Tubbo was telling us about your visit to Emerald. He said you spent the night there as well. I didn't know you and the King were close."

"We're not," George interjected quickly. "You left before I got to tell you. I mentioned in the letter that we spoke at the ball. I never got to tell you about the visit."

"I recall you saying he was interesting. Now's as good a time as any."

George faltered mid-stroke, settling on mixing paints again as he pondered his words.

"Between us, he's... interesting,"

"So you've mentioned," Wilbur snorted.

"Sorry, I don't know how else to put it," George said with a pout, a flush on his cheeks. He was more eloquent than this.

"We've got time."

"He's cocky," George decided to start with. "He thinks highly of himself, and I don't know how to read him from that."

"Yeah, the mask doesn't help," Wilbur agreed, urging him to continue.

"Exactly. And he calls me pretty. I don't know how genuine he is. He says these sweet words, and sometimes I freeze when I'm around him and it's as though he has me under some sort of spell when he stands too close. And it's *infuriating* because I don't know if he *wants* something from me, because he definitely isn't just being nice for the sake of it because I'm new to the whole 'being a prince' thing."

Wilbur had begun to wash his brushes, eyes trained on George and his averted eyes as he spoke. His brows furrowed in focus as he noticed how much this was affecting his friend.

"Does he do anything to make you uncomfortable?" Wilbur asked with a steady voice, treading lightly.

"No? I don't think uncomfortable's the right word. I just... I don't think I could ever put it to words in a way that makes sense. I just don't know. He's being very generous, I'm sure Tubbo mentioned why he was passing through. Maybe I'm just too suspicious of him."

"I think you should always trust your gut," the prince before him spoke, tidying up his set of paints. "But I think you should take some time to listen to what it's actually telling you. It sounds like you're second-guessing a lot, and that might be making it hard to really, properly listen."

George stared at his work for a while, his lip between his teeth and his brows furrowed as he let Wilbur's words sink in. The light green curtains with the Emerald's sunrise casting rays of light

across the guest room carpet stared back at him, almost mocking him. And he sat wondering why of all subjects, he decided to paint that view in particular.

“That’s actually pretty useful. I’ll keep that in mind,” he said quietly, finally meeting Wilbur’s eyes. “Thanks, Prince Soot.”

“Anytime, Prince Henry.”

George’s face scrunched up and he let out a laugh.

“That one doesn’t work.”

Before he left later that evening, he caught a glimpse of the piece Wilbur had been working on. A portrait of a familiar blonde woman was the subject, face half-covered in sheer white pieces of fabrics, folding at just the right angles. The blue eyes stood out distinctly amongst the white cloths. The artist definitely felt strongly for his muse, George noted, though there seemed to be less conviction in *what* the emotion was, exactly. George wondered if Wilbur knew the answer himself.

Chapter End Notes

A longer one this time! Sorry it took longer than usual, but I feel like this one was worth the wait :D Really proud of how this one turned out. I've been loving the comments so far, they're so very thoughtful and I can't wait to hear what you think of this chapter. Enjoy!! <3

Legends Speak of Fish and Fae Alike

Chapter Summary

Dream came looking for an angel, but instead found himself in an emotionally compromising situation.

"You're cocky, my dear king, but you're not stupid."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dear King Clayton Alexander III,

It would be our pleasure to have you over. Our son has told us so much about the beauties within your walls, and we thank you for giving him the opportunity and experience. With that, perhaps it's about time for him to show you the beauties Diamond has to offer. So we wholeheartedly accept your proposal to visit.

We would love to have a word with you privately, as well. We appreciate your courteous consideration of us as his parents, but in the future, rest assured that you need not come through us for permission. Prince George is more than capable of organizing visitations, especially for friends of his own.

Regardless, we look forward to future letters, and to your arrival.

Best Regards,

King and Queen Davidson

Diamond.

George woke up that morning completely unaware that he would be seeing Dream again after only a week.

He was having a relatively good day, too. He climbed out of bed with the quiet sounds of birds chirping in the distance. New soaps had been refilled in the bathroom he used, and the sweet citrusy scents filled his nose as he sunk deeper into the little pool of bubbles.

He sat at breakfast with a smile, not knowing any better. The idle chit chat with his parents over pancakes made it feel like any other day. And it was supposed to be, until his parents dropped the news of Dream joining them for lunch that afternoon, causing George to nearly sputter on his food. Though they apologised for the last-minute announcement, they quickly continued on to tell him

that he was to show the king around the country.

Needless to say, the prince wasn't too keen on this idea.

That's how he ended up in his room, pacing feverishly and making wild gestures while his friend and advisor, Sapnap, watched in dismay.

"George."

"They could have *told* me! I know this is their castle, they make the decisions, but they could have told me he was coming!"

" *George* ."

"They could have given me a heads up, they *know* how I feel about him! They know what I'm worried about, and bringing him *here* of all places. Sapnap, they always tell me when we're expecting company, I'm not *ready* to-"

"George!" Sapnap held onto George's shoulders, causing him to stop his frantic pacing. The shorter boy looked up at him, wide-eyed, hands still trembling. He wrapped his arms around the prince in a warm embrace, and it seemed to calm him down a bit.

"It's okay. It's just Dream, and you're in your own country this time. You're home," he said gently, rubbing his back in a soothing motion, which prompted the prince to wrap his arms feebly around his torso. His breaths mellowed down from its frantic pace to a slow one, albeit still shaky.

"I'll be fine," he stated, though it came out as more of a question.

"You'll be fine," Sapnap agreed. The prince carefully pulled away and sat on his linen sheets, staring out the window to the clouds he could see in the distance. His friend took a seat beside him, the weight of the bed dipping beside him keeping him tethered from going off again.

"Why is he even coming?" He asked, fidgeting with his fingers.

"I don't really know. The meeting with the senior advisory committee last night barely brushed over it at all. They only said the king and queen wanted to talk to him."

"You knew?" George asked, looking over at his friend with a dramatic look.

"I was going to tell you, but I only found you after breakfast. I think I was supposed to keep it from you anyway, though. They knew you wouldn't have given him a chance."

George sighed, falling back on the bed with a faint thump. They were probably right. He stared up at the white ceiling, his once-organized thoughts beginning to jumble again.

Over the past week, George had sent a reply to Dream thanking him for the supplies. He received one back with the same sentiments as before, talking about how he looked forward to seeing George again. That was a few days ago, giving the prince ample time to let his thoughts settle into deciding whether or not he hated the man. He didn't. He simply didn't trust him yet.

George also had plenty of time to think about what Wilbur had advised him to do. Listen to his gut. But despite the week to think about it, he still had no answer for that. He still wasn't sure which thoughts were his instincts, triggered by subtle signals his brain had picked up without him consciously realising, and which thoughts were interferences of his anxiety and preconceived notions of who he thought Dream was. A fearsome leader who became king at 19 and won a war at

age 20. A man who could potentially have an agenda.

He wasn't sure which thoughts to trust.

But now Dream was arriving any minute and he had no clue what to do or where to take him.

Until he remembered a place without fear or foes.

"King Clayton. It's lovely to finally meet you under less formal circumstances," the queen said with a warm smile when the blonde man sat on the other end of the table. "You're just on time, lunch will be prepared in about half an hour."

"Your highness, please. Just 'Dream' is fine," he said, returning with a charming smile of his own. Tea was served to him in a fine ceramic cup and saucer set, which he delicately sipped.

He was dressed nicely. Not as well he did at the ball, but he definitely chose a nice shirt, and the muted green cape coat he had hanging by the door was embellished with white fur along the shoulders. Now he sat with his legs crossed, leaned back casually and ring-adorned fingers gently tapping on the plush backrest which he had his arm leaning over.

"King Dream it is. How was your journey here?" King Davidson asked, prompting Dream to break out a grin.

"It was fine, actually. It's been a while since I've gotten on my horse. I had the chance to make a stop in Obsidian for breakfast as well, the food they have is delightful."

"Your horse? You rode here horseback?" King Davidson asked, eyebrows raised in surprise. "That must have been an especially tiring feat."

Dream hummed in consideration.

"Not really. I train for stamina often, and it's more calming to feel and hear the wind," he explained. "Does Prince George go for rides often?"

"He used to when he was younger. Young lad had a knack for sneaking off to the stables. He hasn't for a while though, as far as I know," the queen explained. "Perhaps you could suggest it when you two head out later on."

Dream smiled, looking down in a way that hid his face. The thought of riding into town with the prince seemed exciting. What he would give to see the neat straight hair pushed around by the wind, his small frame mounted on a horse that was probably way too big for him, and his slender fingers gripping the reigns. Maybe the cold winds would make his cheeks flush a pretty colour, or he would stumble from lack of practice and let out an embarrassed laugh.

"I'd like that. That could be fun," he agreed, reaching for another sip of his tea.

"George tried to hide it from us, but a maid told us of the rose he had tucked by the window. A stem of gold, meaning it was likely from somewhere further north. Do you happen to know where that came from?" King Davidson teased lightly, causing a very faint blush to rise to the young man's cheeks. He hid it by tilting his head down slightly once again.

"That would be me. A gift from the castle. I hope it hasn't wilted yet."

"Care to share why you're sending roses to my son?" King Davidson asked, though his tone showed no threatening intent. A knowing smile was on his face.

"Your son is charming, I will admit to having grown a liking to him, despite his apprehension. I was hoping to speak to you two about that today, out of respect."

"I appreciate your honesty. It's nice to see him mingling with others more often, and we appreciate you keeping him company. Why don't you tell us more about yourself?"

"Of course, though you probably already know a lot about me. I hope the reputation of Emerald has sustained enough to quell worries of your son having to settle for someone who can't take care of him." Dream grinned slightly, looking back up at the king and queen sitting across from him. The queen's brows raised in surprise at his unabashed confidence. "I was raised under strict training and when my father passed, I took the crown at age 19. I value mutual respect and honesty, and I hope my actions will reflect that over time."

"We hope so too," the queen said with a smile, impressed so far. "If that's the case, may we ask how long you've been wearing the mask for?"

Dream's tapping stuttered, and he sat up a little straighter. He cleared his throat before speaking again, keeping a steady voice.

"I suppose I expected questions about that. It's a valid cause to be concerned, not having seen the face of the man hoping to win the heart of your son. I'll share what I can at this point," he spoke, glancing out the window for a moment.

"Of course. Nothing you're not comfortable with yet," the warm voice of Queen Davidson spoke gently.

"I've donned the mask since I was 17, when I began attending events with my father. It was an act of rebellion at the time, my father was not too fond of me having it on. Our relationship wasn't the best, and I wanted to prove to him that my decisions should be my own, especially when it harmed nobody," he let out a soft, unamused laugh. "And when he passed, I decided that it was best for me to remain faceless to the public. By then, I found a few more reasons to justify that. Only those I regard as close friends and family can meet my eyes, and when I show them, they understand why."

King Davidson leaned back, brows furrowed slightly and head tilted to the side. He hadn't expected such honesty from a man who seemed so guarded from the outside. The younger king shared more than was asked, answering questions that he and his wife had lingering on the back of their minds.

"Thank you for sharing. We appreciate the honesty," he said, analyzing the man's body language. Dream's shoulders lifted slightly and dropped, which he understood as a silent sigh.

"Of course. I want to prove my integrity. And should Prince George feel the same for me in the future, I would be honoured to have your approval."

"It's definitely something to discuss further when the time comes, but do know that we see you as a confident, capable man. I think I speak for my husband as well when I say that you seem to be a charismatic young man who knows how to guide a nation and an army."

Dream grinned, mood lightening up from the more solemn one before.

"Thank you, your highness. I had hoped so."

"May I ask another question?" King Davidson asked, taking a sip of his own tea. Dream nodded earnestly.

"You're more than welcome to. I will answer it to the best of my ability."

"The situation with you and Blackstone," he began, voice taking a more serious tone. "There was some debate surrounding what happened and we want clarification from you personally."

"The war. Of course."

"Can you tell us what really happened?"

Dream's brows furrowed under his mask, and his jaw tensed. The memories from two years before flashed through his mind. The aggressive letters back and forth addressed to the king of Blackstone. The dirty tactics to breach his kingdom. He suppressed his rage, not wanting to lose composure in front of the parents of the man he wanted to court.

"King Alexis Quinn II had sent a few letters claiming I needed to surrender my country. He had no leverage apart from his sizable yet less-skilled army. The letters escalated quickly, and he arrived at our shores with soldiers. We had evacuated locals living in the area, expecting such an attack. Our soldiers fought them off, and I sent a troop through to his as well in an attempt to get him to retreat, and eventually it worked."

"There was no meeting?" King Davidson asked, a little skeptical. Dream let out a soft laugh.

"None. He asked me to see him in his castle, but from the dirty tricks he used in the skirmish, I knew it would be a trap. King Alex is a foolish man to think I would fall for such a thing."

"I'm glad to hear that you weren't the instigator of the war, but a victim of yet another one of Nether's attempts at expansion."

"Well, I wouldn't call myself the victim," he said with a grin. "Emerald was pretty much unscathed."

This drew a laugh from the king and queen. They seemed pleased by this response, making Dream bloom with pride.

"Of course. The king underestimated you and you showed him what you were capable of. That must have been quite a hit to the ego," the queen noted, drawing a hum of agreement from the masked man.

"Oh, absolutely. He was livid. Nearly begged me to come to his castle or at least make the journey to their continent. How humiliating to lose to a man who didn't even need to step foot out of his castle to win the battle."

The king and queen nodded and chimed their agreements. The queen glanced to the side, where a servant was signalling her. She placed her tea on the table and cleared her throat gently before speaking.

"Well, it looks like lunch is ready. Shall we continue at the dining table?"

Dream's coat was draped over his shoulders, matching well with the crown resting atop his perfectly waved hair. The chill in the air was oddly inviting, making him want to roam the roads of Diamond for countless hours and let the sweet, crisp air caress his face properly. If only he had a moment alone while wandering, in an area left isolated from other humans. Maybe eventually he'll get the chance to take his mask off and let the wind tickle his eyelashes, feel snowflakes or droplets of its rain fall upon his face. He would take anything their angels would have to offer.

But for now, the presence of the angel next to him would suffice.

They were trotting slowly along a more remote dirt path, winding through the trees. As they rode deeper, the dirt road grew sparse and gave way to clusters of wild grass, a sign of lack of use. Dream knew that they were heading to a river, but he never got clarification on how long their short journey would take. Of course, he dared not complain. Glancing over to his right and seeing the brunette with a faraway look in his eyes made him never want to leave the forest.

The only sounds apart from that of quiet hooves against dirt was the unseen crickets and ruffling of leaves, and he wouldn't have it any other way.

"It doesn't seem like people come out here often," Dream noted absentmindedly when he decided he wanted to hear George's voice again.

"I suppose not. It's off bounds to the public, since this section of the forest is sacred," the angel replied, sounding distracted. Although his body was there next to him, Dream knew that his mind was elsewhere.

"Sacred?" Dream asked curiously. Surely he wouldn't be entrusted to walk through a nation's holy land on his very first visit.

"Well, not quite," George corrected. His tone shifted as he was brought back out of his head. "It's spiritual in its own right. Some legends claim that fae reside in these forests, and the cod in the river nearby are quoted to have gold scales. It's really just a sentimental place for the Davidsons. Generations after generations, we've felt connected to this place. I for one just think it's pretty."

"I'd have to agree with you there. You fit right in," Dream said with a small grin. His heart warmed when he saw the pink bloom in the younger man's cheeks. When he noticed that the prince wasn't going to respond to that, he probed another question.

"Do you believe the legends? The magic?"

George seemed to think about that one, his gaze straight ahead lowering as he considered the question. He let out a contemplative hum.

"I think there are some things we just won't know until we see it. Rather than a question of whether or not people believe in fairytales, it might be more productive to consider why these stories exist."

"I would say it gives people hope," Dream suggested. "The belief that there is something higher than them, and there are beings that humanity can never fully comprehend."

"Maybe there are beings that can never comprehend *us*," George countered. "Maybe we're nothing but stories to them."

"If so, why would they hide?"

"Maybe those stories aren't any good."

A tense silence washed over them as the weight of those words sunk in.

"Humanity can be cruel," the King agreed. "Ruthless, greedy."

"It's not all bad."

"I suppose not. But we were born sinful, right? Flawed. It's in our nature to give in to our impulses. Eat, breed, sleep. We're *taught* to control these impulses. We're *nurtured* to be good, but by nature, we are terrible."

The sound of a gentle stream in the distance was suddenly made apparent as they fell back into another few moments of silence. George took the lead forward, guiding them through a narrow path between the trees until they arrived at a creek. He stopped by the edge, and Dream navigated his horse to be next to George's again.

He carefully climbed off his stallion, holding a hand out for George to help him down. He revelled in the way the blush returned to the brunette's cheeks. He accepted the hand with a quiet 'thank you', his fingertips gripping the gloved palm of the king. Where the gripping gloves had been cut right above the knuckle, the brush of the taller man's fingers made his skin tingle ever so slightly.

They tied their leads to a nearby branch, Dream letting his eyes linger on the pretty man every now and then. The sunlight was diffused through the trees, casting a general glow on him, with speckled rays seeping between the leaves and leaving him blessed with bright freckles dancing across his face.

"I disagree," George finally spoke, taking a seat on a large rock that was only half-submerged in the stream. His knees were tucked to his chest as he stared at the slow stream slipping between pebbles of various sizes.

"Hm?" Dream hummed in curiosity, having lost track of the conversation. He sat next to the prince, his legs crossed. He took his gloves off, stretching his fingers after such a journey.

"I don't think humans are terrible by nature. A man can make a monster, but a monster cannot make a man. If humans were inherently rotten, I don't believe we would be able to tame that."

Dream's brows furrowed, eyes now trained on a tiny fish that was lingering at the bottom of the shallow stream. While the others of its kind swam up the stream, this one was stationary. He wondered why it wasn't like the others.

"Maybe. Or maybe you have too much faith in people."

"I'm just optimistic," the prince said gently, glancing over at Dream tentatively, searching for a response.

He wasn't, really. He was an overthinker, always tearing apart each and every decision he made until an outcome made the most sense. He was prepared for everything to go wrong all the time. But that being said, he saw the best in people. He gave King Alastair a chance, and he saw through Techno's reputation, did not fear him.

"Optimism never won me a war," Dream mused, looking over at the hopeful brown eyes and staring him down with a mask shielding his own uncertain ones.

"Hm. Did it not?"

"It was skill, planning."

George seemed to see through this.

"Maybe. But how much of that confidence was in your competence, and how much of it was in your opponent's incompetency?"

Dream's jaw tensed slightly as his ego was squeezed. George was challenging him, yet the queasy feeling he felt wasn't rage. His brows furrowed and he looked away, feeling uncharacteristically vulnerable under George's gaze. Yet funnily enough, George didn't mean to probe. He was completely unaware of the effect his words were having on the king. Something about this creek made him feel unafraid.

"Does it matter? I knew I was better than him, and I was right."

"You *hoped* you were better than him," George corrected, reaching a hand into the water. The fish that was once still instantly rushed to his hand, going between his fingers. The once seemingly lifeless little creature was in motion, swirling with joy. Dream stared at it, stunned and disbelieving. "You're cocky, dear king, but you're not stupid. You're hopeful, and you mask that with your strengths and willpower."

And the fish that once circled George's fingers finally followed its friends upstream.

They ended the afternoon walking around the castle. Dream had requested a short tour before he set out for home again. He was brought through the throne room, which was not often used, and he admired the various works that hung on the walls. His coat was left in the foyer, but he had left his fingerless gloves on as he hadn't planned on staying for long. The journey back would be a long one, and he had to leave if he wanted to reach home before sunset.

Since they left the creek, things were quiet between them. Not quite tense, but neither of them really had the courage to start another conversation. While the presence of one another was still inherently enjoyable, the silence served as a reminder of the walls they both still had up.

Dream looked at a painting of George, stylistic and detailed. It was almost as beautiful as the real thing, and the style of it was distinct.

"Wilbur," he said quietly under his breath, taking a step closer to admire each and every stroke of oil paint.

George's eyebrows raised slightly.

"You know his work?" The brunette asked quietly, standing next to him to look up at it once again.

"I do. I have a few pieces myself," Dream replied, a little caught off guard. He hadn't meant for George to hear that.

"He is incredibly talented," George stated, drawing a noise of agreement from the king.

They carried on with their stroll around the castle. From the corner of his eye, though, he spotted a familiar sight of the creek, the canvas propped up against the wall and on the floor. A soft smile

rose to his lips, and he was glad to finally see an original piece of George's art. He had recalled the prince mentioning his hobby of painting from that afternoon in Emerald. Beside it, on a much smaller canvas, the familiar splash of light green curtains with rays of sunshine casting through them greeted him warmly and, bringing with it, thoughts of George wrapped comfortably and modestly in silken blankets. He wondered what it was that prompted the prince to want to preserve the likeness of Emerald's guest bedroom. Rather quickly, however, George had passed it and continued walking, a deliberate, silent urge for the king to move on. Dream didn't mention the painting.

As galloped home, he thought about the trip, and how he seemed to make no progress in gaining the young prince's favour. The prince sparked something in him, and although the quiet moments together in intimate silence made him at ease, the king couldn't help but want more. And from the painting he caught a glimpse of, he considered that maybe a part of George did too.

Chapter End Notes

This one was really fun to write!! It's quite different from the other chapters, so I'm a little nervous about the reception, but please let me know your honest thoughts and opinions! I love any feedback <3

Also, thank you for almost 2k hits and over 150 kudos!! It's getting ridiculous, my heart is so warm. I'm beyond glad that you've all been enjoying this so far!

Oh, Demigod, Your Beauty Transcends This World

Chapter Summary

"Clayton-"

"Don't call me that! Stop fucking calling me that!"

-

In which Dream reflects on his past, present and future, and George learns to be a person before he is a prince.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"I'm gonna be king one day, I should be able to make decisions for myself!"

The 17-year-old ripped the mask from his face, glaring at the man who used to call himself a father. The clatter of its buckles sounded faintly at his ferocity.

The man before him rubbed his eyes, brows furrowed and hand clenched into a fist.

"You are the farthest thing from a king where you stand now! What kind of prince would cover his face? A coward!"

"I'm not a coward! It's not hurting anybody. My face is my own, not anybody else's," Dream insisted, pressing down onto the desk with a glare.

"You are a prince of Emerald before you are a free man!" The king slammed his fist on the desk, to which Dream barely flinched. "Everything you *do* or *say* reflects on your kingdom, reflects on *me*!"

"That's *all* you care about? Your reputation?" Dream scoffed, pushing off of the desk and taking a few steps back. His arms waved in sarcastic gestures as he spoke. "Let's see what that comprises of, shall we? The king with more enemies than he can count? The king who works *suspiciously* close with nations of the Nether? Remind me again how a man wearing a mask is going to change a damn thing!"

"Clayton-"

Dream flung the mask against the wall as rage flared up in his chest. It hit harshly with a satisfying thump.

"*Don't* call me that! Stop fucking *calling* me that!"

The king ignored his interruption, not acknowledging the name he wanted to distance himself from, nor the burst of profanity. He had his own point to further.

"You don't have a *clue* how difficult it was to build relations with the countries I do, nor do you know why I choose to do so. You know, if you weren't so young and naive, you might be able to *begin* to understand-"

"Try me!"

"That's beside the *point!*" The china teacup rattled as the table was slammed again. "I'm not going to sit here and let you derail the topic of conversation here, what we're *talking* about is your *unwillingness to dress and behave* as a man of royal blood! What would the people think, that the prince was so *ashamed* of his features that he hid them? Who are they supposed to look to if all they see is a stupid piece of bone?"

"I'm not ashamed!"

"*I am!* "

The silence that overtook the situation was almost more painful than the yelling. The king didn't look at all remorseful of his words, glaring at his son with more hatred than a father should ever harbour. Dream let his resolve crack, turning his back to his father and picking his mask off the floor. He put on his mask before his father could see the tears brimming his eyes. He made his way towards the door, nails digging into his palms as he contained his anger.

"I don't see how mom could have ever loved a man like you."

"I don't need you to understand," the man said coldly before Dream left the room, "I need you to *grow up* ."

Dream stared at himself in the mirror, his dull green eyes void of emotion as he recalled those words. His hand brushed across his cheek absentmindedly, his gaze trailing the large, horrid scar across the bridge of his nose that wasn't there just a few years ago. It extended from under his right eye to his left cheekbone, taking on a more white colour as what was once skin was replaced with scar tissue. The freckles dotting his face were faint, since they were usually hidden from the sun. Closer to his eye, another cut had left an irreparable line on his left eyebrow, the scar tissue cutting across it and leaving behind a light, jagged line.

"A coward," he mumbled quietly to himself, looking down at the piece of carved bone in contemplation. "Funny."

The mask meant many things. His willpower, his identity, his spite. But apart from the sentimental reasons he still wore it, he couldn't deny that its functionality in hiding his scars also played a big part in it. He wasn't necessarily ashamed of them, but something about the torn, imperfect skin ruined the pristine image he had built for himself. It was a vulnerable feat to show people those marks that carried heavy stories.

He was King Dream of Emerald. The crown sat on his head, with gems the colour of clovers, but he didn't feel quite as lucky. It felt like a weight on his head. He had a bitter taste in his mouth, almost forming a scowl as memories of his father surfaced in his mind. It was quiet mornings like this, though, that he usually felt the most angry.

Dream wasn't an aggressive person in his day-to-day life. He was kind to those around him, composed by default, people didn't often see him angry. However, when the bustle of people mellowed down and he was left alone to remember those that wronged him, the burning pit in his stomach, ever-present, became more noticeable. It was a silent, simmering kind of anger, and it very rarely boiled over more than that.

Closing his eyes, Dream took a deep breath, fingers tapping the bathroom counter in slow succession. Finally, he picked the mask up and clasped the buckle behind his head. The weight of the crown felt just a little lighter.

Dream made his way to the dining room, taking a seat. He was still somewhat lost in his head as he began to eat the breakfast laid out for him. He smiled at the servant who brought him his coffee and thanked her. An older lady who had attended to him for years, even when his mother was alive. She smiled back. Thinking about it, she probably forgot what Dream really looked like by now. He wasn't sure how that made him feel. When she returned to the kitchen, he was left alone once again.

Lucky for him, he wasn't alone for long.

Tubbo entered the dining room, oranges in hand and a wide smile on his face.

Tubbo was a sweet boy. Dream had come across him after the war. While surveying the damages by the shores, the young boy was found sitting amongst the rubble. He used to fish with his mother and they managed to build a comfortable life together, selling their catches and saving their coins. When her mother began to lose her sight, he took over, with double the workload and a third of their household income lost. With his mother and little sister safely evacuated further inland in a small home provided to them by the state, he was listening to the shore thinking about what he could do to provide for them now that the dock was gone, along with the infrastructure he needed.

Of course, Dream did what he could. He offered the boy a job; a simple one, with a salary large enough to cover for a helper to take care of his mother and sister. Since then, the boy had become somewhat of a friend to Dream, helping him and keeping him company. He could almost be a little brother, even.

So when the boy offered Dream some oranges to go with his breakfast, he couldn't help but smile.

"What's this, Tubbo?"

"I was in the market and the fruit vendor gave them to me. I thought you might like them!"

Dream motioned him closer and carefully took the oranges from him, inspecting them closer. They looked off, something about them raising alarms. He lifted them carefully and brought them to eye-level.

"Did the vendor say anything? Did they know who you were?" He asked gently, setting one down to focus fully on the other.

"No, I don't think so. She didn't even say hello, just... handed these to me for a trinket! It's a decent deal," he said with a grin.

Dream gave it a gentle squeeze, feeling it squish a little easier than it should. When he hovered it farther from his plate, he carefully dug his thumbs in it and tore it open a little. It was rotten on the inside, darkened to a colour it shouldn't be. He clicked his tongue.

"Tubbo, that lady tried to scam you," he said, sounding slightly irked. The thought of someone tricking his young friend sparked the anger in him again. "I wouldn't buy from her in the future, if I were you."

Seeing the rotten insides, Tubbo's heart sank. He quickly took them back, grabbing a napkin to

wipe the juices from Dream's fingers. The guilt bubbled up in him. Although Dream had never set unrealistic expectations on the boy nor treated him with anything less than respect and compassion, Tubbo had always wanted to please him and make him happy.

"I'm so sorry, Dream, I didn't know-"

"Hey. It's fine, it's not your fault," he said gently, taking the napkin and wiping his own hands. "You're too nice, people take advantage of that if you're not careful." Once his hands were clean, Dream ruffled the boy's hair, offering a smile. "Now, go throw these away and join me for breakfast."

The crackling of the fireplace filled the room, and with it, a glow of bright embers was casted upon it. The thick curtains were drawn to shield the room from the sun, allowing the library to become somewhat of a nest, a place of warmth and comfort. Dream tilted his head against the armrest, legs dangling off the edge while his arm was propped up against the back cushion. He brought the cigar to his lips, taking a slow inhale and savouring the burn in his lungs before blowing the smoke straight up in the air.

On the couch adjacent to him, Techno, who was sitting up, did the same with a thick, tightly packed tobacco. In his other hand held a fine glass of wine, the deep red gently swirling with his hand. Niki was somewhere along the shelves, busying herself with tidying up the books at a leisurely pace.

"What's been going on with you?" Dream asked, interrupting the comfortable silence.

"Well," Techno began, flicking a line of ash from the tip of his cigar, "I've been over at Gold a little more than usual. Don't think I've mentioned that yet."

"Oh, yeah? What's been going on there?" Dream asked curiously, exhaling another puff of smoke. His own glass of wine was sat on the table, the man tilting his head to the side to look at his friend.

"It's nice, always so lively."

"Yeah, I've spoken to Wilbur a few times since I've commissioned work from him."

"I know, he's mentioned. Actually, speakin' of Wilbur," Techno said with a teasing grin, glancing over his shoulder knowingly at Niki, who had her back turned to hide the deep blush on her face.

"I should go, I think Tubbo wanted help with his whittling," Niki said quietly, excusing herself. She shot Techno a look, and he winked at her playfully, amused by her reaction. Dream pretended not to notice this exchange, sparing Niki further embarrassment.

"Knock before coming back in, yeah," Dream chimed in, to which she responded with a quiet 'Yes, King' before the door closed behind her.

He stared at the door for a moment, making sure that it remained closed, before unbuckling the straps of his mask and taking it off. The warmth of the fire tickled his nose and cheeks. He placed it on his chest, closing his eyes with a soft sigh.

"Did you want me to look away?" Techno asked, eyes trained on the liquid he was swirling in his

glass. The hog-faced man removed his mask fairly often around Dream, but he would often tell the king to avoid staring at his features. Techno figured he'd give Dream the respect of asking.

"No, you can look. We've known each other long enough," Dream assured, tilting his head and looking at his friend. When the masked man looked back at him, although Dream couldn't see his eyes, he knew that it was trained on his scars. He flashed his friend a lazy grin. "Only if you call me handsome, though."

Techno rolled his eyes, an amused smile on his face.

" *Oh, demigod, your beauty transcends this world* ," Techno recited, voice dripping with sarcasm.

" *And I thank the stars that I wasn't born in the next one* ," Dream finished.

"You never told me why that Diamond kid was here the other week," Techno reminded him.

"Ah. Well, I've had my eye on him. He's a beauty, isn't he?" Dream hummed, staring up at the ceiling. He blew smoke on the air, hoping the haze would form a picture of the angel. It didn't. He tried again anyway.

"He's well-read, I'll give him that. Polite, too," Techno agreed. "He's good friends with Wilbur, so he's mentioned."

"Yeah? I saw one of his works at Diamond's castle, we had a brief talk about that."

"You were at their castle? When?" Techno asked, a brow raised. "Didn't bother to give your old pal a visit along the way?"

"It was yesterday morning, you weren't in," Dream defended. "Where were you, anyway?"

Techno added to the cylinders of ash in the tray.

"Ah, that makes sense. Was in Gold, meeting with Philza. We've been in talks for a while now, he's been helpin' me out. From managing logistics of trade, to talking about work-life balance. He's kinda like the father I never had," the hog-masked man admitted.

"That's... cool," Dream said with his lips pressed in a thin line at the mention of a father. His gaze steeled, not that Techno noticed.

"He gave me an offer... I kinda wanted to hear your thoughts about it."

"Oh? Do tell."

Techno took a sip of his wine before leaning forward to set it down. He took his own mask off, setting it down next to his glass as he spoke.

"He said to me, 'Techno, you're like a son to me. You don't need to live alone to be a leader.' So..." he pursed his lips, crossing his legs. "So he suggested a merger, of sorts."

Dream sat up at that, alert. He looked at Techno with wide eyes. The man looked back, composed yet conflicted, brows furrowed slightly.

"He said what?"

"Dream, he offered me a home in exchange for a hollow castle. Not even, actually, he didn't want the castle *or* the land."

"What's he playing at?" Dream asked, almost suspiciously.

"Remember when I said he felt like a father to me?"

Dream's surprise morphed to realisation. His friend looked back at him, still appearing conflicted, searching for answers in his emerald eyes.

"Something tells me this isn't a power thing."

"It's not a power thing."

"Okay, so he wants to adopt you, more or less. Or, well, take you under his wing," Dream tried to consolidate the situation, subconsciously making hand gestures to aid him. "Which would mean you moving into Gold."

"And I would be giving up Obsidian's status as an independent, sovereign nation," Techno finished, nodding along.

"That's... a difficult one," Dream admitted, setting his mask on the table and picking up his wine. He took a careful sip. "Do you know his motivations?"

"I know Phil. He suggested this because he believes it's what's best for me. Running a country on my own, no advisors that came before me, it's gonna catch up to me eventually. He said it was like I was stacking hats on my head. A crown, a general's helmet, a city planner. And even though I can carry the weight of it so far, Niki's the one making sure it keeps its balance. It's taxing on her too."

"So he wants you to move in and lead from Gold, so you can share their resources," Dream clarified, to which Techno nodded. "What would that leave Obsidian?"

"An independent state of Gold. I would have full control over Obsidian as a region still; politically, financially. I would still be regarded as the leader of Obsidian. But by name, it would fall within Gold's borders."

Dream thought about it.

"What are you afraid of?" He asked gently.

Techno sighed, picking up his mask and looking down at it. His brows remained furrowed in contemplation.

"I want to do right by my country. Dream, I fought so hard for Obsidian to be recognised. I had to hold an axe to the throat of a king. I have blood on my hands. How would the people feel if I just give that away? The soldiers fought for Obsidian to even exist."

"But it does exist."

Techno's fingers halted from where he was stroking the mask. His lips fell in a thin line. So, Dream continued.

"You fought for Obsidian, building a nation on the foundations of courage, unity and prosperity. *That's* still there. This isn't gonna erase what you've made. And if there's more you want out of a merger or allyship, it sounds like Philza would be more than happy to re-discuss the terms. But Obsidian will still exist, and you will still be able to lead them to further heights."

Techno let out a sigh, rubbing his face. The quiet crackling of the fire filled the room again in an

almost assuring way.

"Yeah. Yeah, you're right. I'll continue looking into it," he mumbled. "Let's get back to talking about Prince George, you weren't done there."

A faint blush raised to Dream's cheeks. Techno's eyebrows raised when he saw that.

"Wait. Hold on. Is that.... A blush, I see?" Techno teased, causing Dream to let out a laugh which he echoed.

"Alright alright, don't make me put the mask back on."

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Go on. Tell me about him"

Dream laid down in his seat again, legs draped over the armrest as they were before. He lit another cigar, getting comfortable and letting his mind paint a pretty picture.

"You've met him. He has kind eyes, despite the air of professionalism he keeps on. It's like he has a mask of his own. But the times I've caught him alone, I see the way it melts off. It's like I'm different with him. I want to be better when I'm with him."

Techno hums in acknowledgement, pouring himself more wine.

"Do better how?"

"I don't know. I want to make him smile, blush, laugh. I want to have everything he's willing to offer. And it's almost like he has me wrapped around his fingers, even though he's so apprehensive about me. He has my mind on a tether, it never strays from him for long."

"So what d'you like about him?"

Dream took a moment to think about how he wanted to articulate his thoughts. He took another drag of his cigar.

"He hides. In his own way, he keeps himself guarded even when it doesn't look like he does, but I notice. I think it's the glimpses through that which draws me in. The moments where the superficial, polite prince resolve breaks down and he's left wide-eyed and curious. That makes me want to know him better. Moments like that leave me absolutely breathless."

Techno watched Dream for a moment. The way he stares at the ceiling longingly, gets lost in his head. It truly was a connection that Dream believed in, and he had never seen the man behave like that before.

"That's really sweet. I didn't expect that from you," Techno said honestly, not a hint of teasing in his voice. "I hope he sees it."

"That's the thing, I don't know if he does. He doesn't trust me yet, is the thing. I wouldn't blame him, my walls are pretty high too, for the most part. Not when I'm around him, though. He has to see that," Dream said with a sigh. "He should see it."

"How's he gonna see it when he can't even meet your eyes?" Techno pointed out. Dream opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again when he realised the man was right. "I see you blushin' just talkin' about him, that look in your eyes. But he doesn't have that luxury that I do right now."

"I won't hide it from him forever," Dream mumbled. "I was gonna take the mask off eventually."

"Sure, but until then, you need to show him that he can trust you."

Dream closed his eyes, tapping the ash from the end of his second cigar in the tray. He let out a soft sigh.

"I was planning to send over a gift."

"Ooh. Do tell."

"It's pretty common knowledge that Diamond isn't.... The wealthiest nation in the continent. The winter's going to be particularly harsh on them, with their stunted crops. So I was thinking of sending a carton or two of our crop nutrients."

Techno nearly dropped his cigar. The Dust of Emerald was a fertilizer of sorts, the most powerful one known to man. It kept crops alive through the seasons, stimulated growth at double its speed under optimum conditions. Emerald had *never* shared this secret resource with any other nation, no matter how much they were willing to pay.

"The Dust? That resource has been guarded so closely by your nation for *decades* ," Techno said in disbelief.

"I know, I know," he defended, hands raised in surrender. "But Techno, I've spoken to King and Queen Davidson. They're honest people, and I trust them. Besides, if I show George *I* trust *him* , he might be more inclined to believe that *I* can be trusted."

"I don't know, that's still a dangerous game you're playin', Dream. If other nations catch wind of this, *especially Netherite*- "

"They'll want a piece of it too. I know. That's why they won't know. I'll keep it quiet. Only you and Tubbo would have a clue. Schlatt's been cryptic enough, since that letter he sent me after the ball. I'm not gonna risk him finding out."

Techno stared at him for a moment, scanning the scarred man's face and reading his eyes. His brows were drawn tight in a stern manner, leaving Dream feeling scrutinized. Although he knew his friend wasn't judging his character, he understood that this was a pretty big move to make and he recognised that Techno just wanted to make sure he was aware of the implications of said move.

"Just make sure you don't put yourself in a position where you might be left wondering if you've bought his love."

Dream looked away, staring at the fire as he processed Techno's words. After a few moments, he met his gaze again, letting out a quiet sigh.

"I'm not-... The last thing I want is to put any pressure on him. And I try my best not to. I trust his parents, but I want to know that I can trust him as well. I want to talk to him one more time before entrusting him with this," he said quietly. "When I sent him that first letter, he didn't need to come here. You remember last week, yeah? He came all this way. If he truly, genuinely didn't want to be around me, he wouldn't have come. I'm not backing him into a corner here."

"And what if he doesn't want to talk to you this time? Are you going to dangle it over his head?"

"Of course not," Dream said with a scowl. "I'd send some supplies we have for them to store. I still want to help him, Techno. Even if I can't entrust him with the Dust of Emerald, I want to help him somehow."

Techno closed his eyes, letting out a quiet sigh. He leaned against the backrest, bringing his braid to the front.

“Alright. That’s all I wanted to know. I hope it works out, I really do,” Techno’s gruff voice sounded before he pulled another breath of smoke.

"Me too," Dream said, letting his eyes linger on his friend once more before resting his eyes again.

George was back there, on the rock, his legs crossed. The crickets were quieter now than they were the day before. In his hands, a daisy he had plucked under a tree was twirled gently. It hadn’t closed up yet, which surprised him. The delicate white petals smoothened under his thumb. Beside him, Sapnap laid back with his forearm over his eyes, shielding them from the stray rays of sunshine that hurt his eyes.

“Why haven’t we been here in a while?” The advisor asked curiously. “We used to love this place.”

“I... I don’t know,” George admitted, looking down at the water and seeing his reflection. “I guess I felt like I never needed this place. I didn’t want to use it like a crutch.”

Sapnap’s face scrunched up and he tilted his head down, nudging George gently with his foot.

“Using it as a crutch? You’re allowed to have happy places, dumbass.”

“I know that,” George snorted, amused. “I do. I guess I thought I was getting too old to be playing in the forest like a kid.”

“You say that as though this is any other forest. This is basically a massive heirloom,” Sapnap pointed out, sitting up from where he lay. He kicked his boots and socks off, before scooting closer to George and carefully dipping his feet in the crystal clear water. “In fact, I think it takes a certain maturity to really appreciate it.”

“Sap, you’re not the one with an affinity with it. You’re not bound by blood,” George said with a raised brow. He took his own boots off and followed suit, the warm water caressing his calves and the soles of his feet.

“I basically am,” he argued with a grin. “Hell, look, the creatures here love me.” A small fish swimming seemed to pause to circle Sapnap’s calf, bumping against him gently before continuing on its journey upstream.

“You’re definitely trusted,” he agreed. “But you don’t feel the pull. Y’know, sometimes, I sit here and I feel an overwhelming urge to shut down and just... listen.”

“Yeah? Listen to what?”

“The crickets. The leaves. It’s like they guide me, or something. That’s why grandad came here when he felt lost. I didn’t realise it then, but now I get it.”

Sapnap smiled softly, carefully taking the daisy from George’s hand and tucking it behind the prince’s ear.

“Take the crown off.”

“What? Why?” George asked, confused.

“It’s weighing on you. I can tell. If you wanna truly be at peace here, you gotta take it off. Just trust me on this one.”

And so George did, placing the silver diadem in Sapnap’s lap. He closed his eyes and laid back down. Sapnap was right, it felt like a million pounds had lifted off his shoulders, and he felt lighter than ever. His skin was tingling, it felt like a thousand little butterflies had landed on him and were giving him a thousand little kisses.

“Better?” Sapnap asked gently, amused.

The man hummed in response, enjoying the liberation of being George; Not Prince Davidson, just George. And the forest embraced him as he stripped his title off for just the few hours that they were there. He understood what it meant to lead as a person rather than a prince.

“Better.”

Chapter End Notes

I kind of was itching to write and managed to get this done in 4 days. So two posts within a week! This isn't gonna be a consistent thing, I definitely won't always have the time, so I write while I still can :p

Anyway, I hope you enjoy!! Thank you so much for all the kudos, comments, bookmarks and hits!!! The reception has been mindblowing, and I appreciate everyone who decided to give this little fic a chance :) Share it with a friend, maybe?

Let me know which bits made you react the most! The long comments especially have been warming my heart, I always get excited seeing the email that there's a new comment :D

Love All The Same

Chapter Summary

"That's not fair," George breathed out, closing his eyes.

Dream let out a soft, amused hum.

"It isn't. You're allowed all you could ever want, all you could ever dream for with no repercussions. Such a rare occasion, some people would die to be in a fantasy like this one. And yet, you choose not to indulge."

-

After a particularly intense lucid dream, George receives a letter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They were back at the creek again, but this time, the sun had set. It was impossible to determine what time it was, but the dark sky was littered with more stars than he had ever seen in Diamond. Swirls of faint, translucent pinks and purples painted it in a way he had never experienced before. It was like he was seeing the world through a new lens.

Looking around, the fireflies lit the forest, and the stream his feet were dipped in was glowing a blue hue. Climbing the barks of trees, the usually green algae glowed a similar light. It was magical. A faint maple syrup smell was wafting through the air, though it didn't appear to have a direct source.

George looked over at the dirty blonde next to him. He had his mask sitting on the rock. As hard as he squinted, he couldn't seem to focus on Dream's face higher than his lips. It was a hazy blur.

"Hi, darlin'," his smooth voice spoke as his lips curved to a lazy smile. Dream leaned back to prop himself up on his arms, waving his legs with the flow of the river.

George tilted his head slightly, a smile on his lips. He tried to examine his face closer, but to no avail.

"Hi," he responded, hands placed neatly in his lap. "We're back here."

"Of course. You're happy here, and I like seeing you happy."

A faint blush rose to his cheeks and he looked down bashfully.

"Don't hide from me, George. I know you're blushing." There was a hint of amusement in the low voice, and it only made George blush harder.

"I can do whatever I want, you're not the boss of me," George teased, sliding off the rock and letting the water caress his clothed shins as he took a few careful steps.

"Exactly," Dream mumbled, following suit and wrapping his arms around the man's waist. "You

can do whatever you want."

Even though he knew it was a dream, it still felt so real. The warmth of his chest against George's back, the breath against his neck, all making him melt in his arms. Still, despite indulging for a few more seconds, he pulled away and took another few steps to a deeper section of the creak. It was up to his knees now, verging on his lower thighs. A quiet, distant ringing in his ears made itself apparent, though it was quiet enough to tune out.

"Surely you know the implications of that," he warned over his shoulder, watching the glowing stream sway as he moved. Dream hummed.

"Remind me," the faceless man said gently, taking a few steps closer again.

"You not being real is going to be more of an issue than assurance." He turned around, looking at the man's lips since it was all his eyes would let him see. "I'm going to get too caught up with you and you're gonna make me feel things that I'll think about for the rest of the day once I wake up."

"Well," Dream said in a quiet, breathy voice as he stepped closer and rested a hand on George's cheek. His eyelids fluttered upon contact and his hand instantly rose to hold it in place. "It looks like you've already been feeling things."

George hadn't noticed the water had risen to his stomach. Either the ground had dipped lower under their feet or the water had risen, but it didn't really matter, nor did George care. All he was focused on was the familiar feeling of Dream's calloused fingers pressed against his cheek and his other hand slipping down to his waist, pulling him ever so slightly closer as they waded in the water together.

"That's not fair," George breathed out, closing his eyes.

Dream let out a soft, amused hum.

"It isn't. You're allowed all you could ever want, all you could ever dream for with no repercussions. Such a rare occasion, some people would die to be in a fantasy like this one. And yet, you choose not to indulge."

"All I could ever dream for, huh?" George said with a soft laugh. "Don't flatter yourself."

"So tell me I'm wrong." Dream leaned in close. His eyes were nothing but static to George, yet the smaller man knew they were boring into him, watching him with an intense expression he couldn't see. "Tell me I'm not what you want, darlin'."

And he couldn't. The smug smirk playing on Dream's lips were teasing, pulling George in. The hand that was on his cheek had slid down along his jaw to settle under his jaw, carefully cradling the smaller man's face and keeping his gaze on him.

"You're insufferable, I hate you," George mumbled, though there was no bite to his words.

"You don't."

George's hands rested on Dream's chest, gently gripping his shirt. He wasn't sure whether he meant to pull him closer or push him away.

"I don't," he admitted. "Tell me, fantasy, how real do you really feel?"

Dream's breath fell against George's nose now, it's subtle warmth a comforting sensation. As he

spoke, George clung to every word.

"As real as you've let me be. I exist as you know me. Everything you've seen, everything you've felt. Let me show you."

George's eyes flickered down to his lips again. The quiet hush of the stream and the sounding of crickets tuned down, giving way to the quiet ringing in the back of his ears.

He closed his eyes and leaned in. The ringing grew louder. The hand cradling his jaw now sliding to the back of his head, pulling closer.

He waited for their lips to meet.

His eyes fluttered open again, the ringing completely gone. The scenes played out in his head in hazy flashes as he drifted into a more conscious state. His skin was still tingling.

The disappointment weighed his heart down, and he pulled the sheets over his head, letting out a quiet sigh. *Of course, that just happened*. He closed his eyes and curled up comfortably, wanting to go back, but there wasn't a hint of sleep left in him. Still, he laid there, surrounded by linen, and let his mind pick apart everything all over again.

A part of him was annoyed, tired that his subconscious had done that to him. He was thrown into a perfect world with the perfect version of someone he knew and now that he's awake, that's all he'll be able to see of Dream. The rough fingertips, the low voice, the proximity. It all had him breathless, yearning. What's worse, he woke up before the climax of the story.

Dreams were often nonsensical. George used to have countless, embarrassing dreams of presenting a speech to his people only to realise his clothes had disappeared. The ones with his teeth falling out were terrifying in the moment, but he would always wake up with his teeth just as he had left them. Waking up brought comfort. Yet, in this case, George woke up with conflicting feelings and a weird desire for something he couldn't place. He wanted to go back.

The steady knock on his bedroom door made George stifle a groan of distaste. He sat up and composed himself, before calling out.

"Who is it?"

"It's me," a familiar voice called out before the door opened and Sapnap walked in. He had an envelope in his hand and when he saw a blur of green where the seal should be, George pulled the covers back over his head and groaned once again.

God, it felt like the world had aligned to remind George what his place was.

He wasn't just *George*, able to stroll through the forest as and when he pleased and wade around the creek with charming, faceless men. He was *Prince Davidson*. The need for separation of the two was what kept George from listening to his gut, which was something he realised when he went back there with Sapnap the other day. Still, he would never openly admit something like that. It was like he knew how he felt, but being aware of the interferences didn't make them go away like Wilbur made it sound like they would.

"This one's confidential," Sapnap said, though his voice was muffled slightly through the covers. "Like, *super* confidential. Kid who sent it made that very clear."

"Huh? Why?" George mumbled, rubbing his eyes and finally kicking the covers off himself.

"No idea. King and Queen Davidson have been given a letter of their own and it can only be discussed with the most loyal, trusted advisors. Whatever's in here can't get out to other nations."

George sat up and reached for it. Sapnap sat on the edge of the prince's bed, handing it over. The seal was peeled off rather carefully as he scooted to lean against the headboard.

"Is it urgent, do you know?" George asked, a faint pout forming on his lips. The last thing he needed was to read the neat, cursive handwriting of the man in question.

"I think it is. But hey, it could probably wait till after breakfast," his friend suggested, sensing the Prince's hesitance. "Just keep the letter somewhere safe so a maid doesn't stumble across it."

With his legs tucked up comfortably to his chest, he stared at the green wax seal he had seen so many times.

"Yeah, okay. Hold onto it for me, then. I'll get dressed and meet you downstairs."

Dearest Prince George,

I greatly enjoyed the afternoon with you by the creek. Your words haven't left my mind, and I still ponder whether evil is born or made. I haven't settled on an answer yet.

It's no secret that the stunted crops have affected your kingdom greatly and with winter just around the corner, I express my most sincere concerns for you and your people, and my honest desire to help. My prince, emerald is wealthy and I am more than willing to send some supplies to tide over the winter. Rather than simply giving you a few wagons of non-perishables, I feel it would be much more beneficial to your people if resources went into helping them grow what they already have instead. To summarise, I wish to send over the Dust of Emerald - enough to sustain your people comfortably without rations.

That being said, entrusting someone with this resource is not something I have ever done. No other nation has sought for it for reasons other than greed, and have offered handsome amounts of gold. I don't want what they have to offer. I don't trust them.

But I trust your parents a great deal, George. I've shared more with them than I've shared with most other kingdoms. They are good people, and I know they value transparency and integrity. Yet, I still feel so far from you. I need to know I can trust you with this resource that's been protected so closely for decades. Although you are more valuable and handsome than any sum of money any nation could possibly offer,

you are human. Any kind of relationship with you is priceless on its own.

Moreover, I want you to trust me as well. I wish to speak to you in person again. Sometime this week would be best, the seasons are changing fast. I want to know you deeper than at an arm's length away. I want to trust you, and I want you to trust me too. To do so, I'd like to show you our white flowers before they hide for the winter. There's more to Emerald than the castle, and I promise your time will be worth your while.

However, I respect your decision if you would prefer not to have another visit to Emerald. Your comfort comes before anything, and if my presence would not bring that, just say the word. The rations will be delivered regardless.

I hope to hear from you soon, my dear prince.

Yours sincerely,

Dream :)

Emerald

The oil paints weren't cooperating today. George had tried his best to keep his hands and mind busy, but it seemed as though the universe wanted him to dwell on the faceless man and his words.

He was sitting on the floor of his bedroom, a canvas around the size of his torso propped up against the wall in front of him. Sapnap was laying on his lap, eyes closed. He had just finished a few hours of physical training, and after the warm shower, he was ready to relax. However, the tenseness in his friend's movement and the growing frustration as he painted over different sections repeatedly made that impossible. Each jerk of the brush brought an unwelcomed movement to the thigh that he was using as a pillow.

"Are you gonna tell me what's on your mind or keep painting passive-aggressively and ruining your brushes?" Sapnap asked, rubbing his eye gently. His voice was slightly raspy from the exertion out in the field.

George glanced down at him suddenly acutely aware of his stiff movements. He let out a quiet sigh.

"You're gonna hate me."

"I'm your friend, I'm not gonna hate you," Sapnap assured, peeking an eye open to meet George's.

"You're also my advisor, you're gonna hate me."

"Well... yeah, you're right, I might hate you," Sapnap joked with a light laugh. "But I'd still be your friend, and I'd still want the best for you."

George pursed his lips as he tried one more time with the pigment. When the paint swiped on with stiff lines instead of a faded gradient, he let out a sigh and gave up.

"The letter. Dream wants me to spend another night there before he sends us the dust. Doesn't that

feel a bit... I don't know." George struggled to find the words, his paintbrush now abandoned in the cup of water. "Like I'm selling my time?"

Sapnap hummed softly in consideration, watching the conflicted look on his friend's face.

"You feel like Dream's trying to buy your time, with aid as his leverage."

"I... sort of? I don't think it's that malicious, but it still feels ridiculously transactional," he mumbled, now staring at the unfinished work before him.

"And?" Sapnap looked unimpressed.

"What do you mean 'and'?" George said helplessly, hand ruffling his friend's freshly washed hair. The man's face scrunched up.

"What was it that you told your parents? 'Transactional doesn't mean superficial'?" The advisor reminded, reaching up to push at George's nose, making the prince laugh lightly and whip his head away. "He's out here sending us resources when *no* other country had done so before. You don't even have to go, he's gonna send food anyway."

George chewed his bottom lip, still unsure. He still wasn't sure what Dream thought of him, whether he really was just a 'pretty face' to him. And yet, regardless, the sincerity in his actions, sending aid to Diamond with practically nothing in return, spoke volumes. At the end of the day, Dream wanted to get to know George and the brunette would be lying if he were to say he wasn't just as curious to know the masked man.

"You're probably right."

"Of course I am. He's trying to care, George. Try back."

The prince picked his brush up again. The oil paints seemed to be more malleable now that his worries were quelled. With his friend falling asleep on his thigh and the quiet hum of the late autumn wind against the window and curtains, George smiled softly, staring at the scene before him. It was just as stylized as it's first rendition, but with cooler tones and a glowing stream, his dream had come to life on a canvas, with the barely-noticeable white piece of bone left sitting on a rock.

Wilbur watched Niki intently, leaning against one of his older canvases. The woman wasn't much of a painter, which made her concentration all the more endearing. Every now and then, the prince would sit up behind her, guiding her right hand to hold the brush correctly and reminding her to relax her wrist so that the lines would come out smoother. He'd let out encouraging quips, and occasionally tease her for her rigidity. She would laugh all the same, pushing him back playfully.

However, things were different from how Wilbur thought they'd be. Their personalities glided over one another and bounced back and forth so easily, yet he felt his attraction had changed. And while Niki didn't exactly keep an arm's length away, he could tell she felt it too. His awe for her still sustained, but he wanted to admire it *with* her instead of *for* her.

Wilbur's initial reaction to the new, pink hair was that of surprise, but he found it just as beautiful as the blonde he remembered from the ball. After the first time she and Techno visited Gold, his

muse had been reinvented, and works of pinks and blues were created. Now that Techno was in another private meeting with his father, they managed to slip into Wilbur's workspace and enjoy each other's company. The lighthearted, friendly banter that ensued only solidified the words they had yet to speak, until now.

"I really enjoy your company," Niki spoke quietly. "I think you've helped me explore who I really am."

"Yeah?" he hummed as he finished another stroke of colour. "I really enjoy your company as well. I feel like I could spend hours with you here, just, talking about nothing."

Niki's eyes lit up slightly, her heart warming in her chest, but the feeling of ambivalence persisted.

She had a difficult time reading Wilbur. At times, she thought that they were on the same page. With him not really making any moves or attempting to progress their relationship past a platonic level, she felt at ease. But it was the bigger things - the paintings in the corner of the room, his kind words, the way he laughed a little differently in a way that made her feel significant. While these gestures flattered her, the concern of Wilbur wanting *more* lingered in her mind like a scavenger in the distance; waiting, watching, always lurking. Because she knew that that was love.

"I need to tell you something." Her mouth moved quicker than her mind and before she could even process the thought, it had already left her lips.

Wilbur looked up and, seeing the expression on her face, set his brush down carefully to give her his attention. Her eyes weren't meeting his for whatever reason.

"Of course, what is it?"

"I don't want to kiss you."

Wilbur blinks a few times, startled. This seemed to surprise even Niki herself, whose hand dashed over her mouth, disbelieving that she said that. Her eyes, while still downcast, were wide. There was a moment of silence between them, both of them still registering what was said.

"I... didn't expect you to?" Wilbur finally spoke, cutting the almost-tension in the air.

Niki finally looked up, eyes still wide, but the way her brows nudged together slightly hinted her confusion.

"You... don't?"

"I don't quite know, but I don't... I don't think so? Niki, where's this coming from?"

He reached for her hands, gently pulling them from her face and holding them in his hands.

"I- You were painting me and, and you've been so nice and now you're holding my hands like that-"

Wilbur pulled his hands back like she had burned him, brows knitted in concern. His voice was alarmed.

"Does that make you uncomfortable? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to, I can stop-"

"No, no, it's not that! *God*, I'm sorry, I'm making things weird, aren't I?" Niki began to get up, but Wilbur reached for her wrist, a gentle grip enough to ask her to stay, but enough for her to deny it.

"You're not, I just want to understand," Wilbur pleaded, the hurt in his voice making Niki's heart ache. "Please... Just talk to me."

The second or two that passed felt like full minutes, both staring at one another with a fear that stemmed from uncertainty; Of being able to sort through their thoughts and feelings, or of losing the ease of one another's company for good. Niki had unravelled a thread and. She finally sat down again.

"I just... I feel so connected to you, I feel like our bond is special - sacred even. I like who I am around you. You've shown me so much of who I could be and opened up so many possibilities for me to explore my identity. But after all that, I'm not... I'm not in love with you. I'm sorry."

As Niki's voice began to tremble, Wilbur reached forward and wrapped his arms around her. Seeing her like this, torn in such a way, pained gasps escaping her throat just shy of a sob. She leaned into his comforting embrace, arms meekly wrapping around him.

"It's okay. It's okay, you have nothing to be sorry for," he whispered, running his fingers through her pink hair soothingly. "Y'hear me? Absolutely nothing."

"Does it not hurt you? You've shown me more love than I thought was possible, and to know that I may never reciprocate..."

"Not at all," Wilbur mumbled. "I love you, but I'm not even certain I'm in love with you either. I suppose a part of me thought that it was how things were *supposed* to be. Y'know? Meet someone lovely, you fall in love. And I'm a hopeless romantic by nature, so I just sort of... assumed that that was what was going to happen. But you did absolutely nothing wrong, especially when I think I might feel the same about you."

With that, Niki pulled back to look at Wilbur, an unreadable expression on her face. "You're not... in love with me?"

"I don't think I am."

"But the paintings-"

"-Were made out of love and admiration, yes. But love comes in many different forms and while they can be hard to distinguish from one another, while I tend to be inclined towards a certain way, I can recognise that it's love all the same. You are beautiful, just as I find my father beautiful, and just as I find George beautiful. You are my muse"

Niki let out a slow exhale, and with it, the burden that she had been carrying all this while followed, dissipating in the air and diffusing in far less complicated tufts.

"Thank you."

With that, they found themselves in another hug, one of security and relief that their friendship had not been compromised.

The quiet creaking of the door went unnoticed and seeing the two in such a solemn state, Techno decided to close it again. He felt as though he'd seen something he shouldn't have. He gave a proper knock. After a bit of shuffling and hushed whispers, the door finally opened and Wilbur was face-to-face with the masked ruler.

"Oh! Techno?"

Wilbur's face was flushed, Techno noticed, but especially his eyes, which confused him a little. He wondered what had happened, but chose not to pry. Before he could say a word, though, Niki pushed past Wilbur and through the door, greeting Techno with a slightly panicked expression.

"Technoblade, I'm so sorry. I thought the meeting would last longer, I should have been-" She was cut off by a gentle hand on her shoulder. The brute-ish man offered a slight smile.

"Nothing to apologise for. But I do need you to come with me," Techno's voice spoke evenly. "Not right away, you can finish what you were painting if you'd like."

The silence that made itself known was thick, with a question they wanted to ask but didn't quite want to know the answer to.

"Are you going to talk to dad about this? It's not what you think."

"We're going to talk to him, yes. But it's not my place to speculate," Techno assured gently, taking a step back. "We'll see you in the living quarters in about half an hour."

With that, Techno was on his way, leaving behind a rather confused Niki and Wilbur. As the door clicked shut, he could hear their shouts of excitement and disbelieving laughs. He let out a soft laugh as he walked back to where he left the king. Phil was tidying up some papers at the long table of the meeting room. He looked up at Techno with a warm smile.

"Hey, son." Techno let out a laugh, amused though not opposed to Phil's choice of addressing him. He helped with tidying up some of the meeting notes, putting away the ink and quills. "Where's Niki? We were supposed to show her her new room."

"She'll join us in the living quarters, she was doing some painting and I figured she should finish first."

With a raised brow, Phil asked, "Does she even know that you two are moving?"

"We'll tell her when we show her. Besides, she's been wanting to come spend time in Gold for a while now. She'll definitely take it as good news."

"Yeah? That's good," Phil hummed, a smile on his face. They were walking now, the documents neatly tucked under Phil's arm.

"So... Do I have to call you dad, now?"

Phil shrugged, giving Techno a gentle pat on the back as a thank you for the help.

"Only if you want to."

Chapter End Notes

We're around halfway done!! This really is moving quick. And yes, I've been extra motivated, so there are WAY more chapters than I will ever be able to post within a week again, I think. But I hope you liked it!! I really liked writing the dream sequence and the end ehehhehe

And holy shit, thank you for 3k hits! It's ridiculous! I appreciate all of you so so much.

Thank you for your support thus far, be it with kudos, bookmarks, comments, or even just reading. I feel so fulfilled writing this, and it genuinely brings me so much joy seeing the response it's been getting. Have a lovely day everyone, I hope you enjoy!

Unravel

Chapter Summary

The mark of new beginnings can often be found in the memories of old ones.

Dream definitely has old ones to draw from.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The castle was quiet now. It was eerie. Techno felt his blood buzzing underneath his skin. His senses were on high alert. Every little creek, every audible breeze, every noise that wasn't his own made him tighten his grip on his axe, now dripping with crimson. He had barely had a chance to catch his breath all this while. After the hours of clashing metal and tourniquets and flaming arrows and the taste of blood and...

And now it was quiet. Pristine, even. He almost felt guilty for dragging the red across the marble floors, almost cringed when he crossed a carpet, leaving glaring footprints where he walked. But he reminded himself of the hurt his people had been caused at the hands of this man, this entire nation.

'The carpets were red, anyway.'

Techno knew how they operated. He wasn't a stranger to the customs and values of the Nether. It was a ruthless place, where people came second. It's just business. They were resourceful, intelligent, even brave in their own right, he had to give credit where credit was due. When it comes to The Nether and The Overworld continents, the respective countries rarely inter-mingled, with the exception of the unspoken Emperor who had a hand in everyone's pockets - the rich, ambitious king of Netherite.

However, the said-Emperor made the mistake of trying to pocket Technoblade's region as a whole, with the intent of turning it into a satellite state for them. That's how Techno ended up in the Kingdom of Netherite, with blood on his shoes and the axe feeling lighter than it should ever be, as though the weight of those it maimed was nothing. His heart should be heavy, his armour should feel like it was chained onto him, but neither of it was true. And he hated every minute he spent guiltless. It made him feel less human.

Although he pushed it away, he knew that this was his nature. This was what he was good at, unstoppable with a shield and axe. It was in his blood to fight, to lead his people to victory, and rest assured, that he will. Technoblade was the warrior who wanted to be more, and he refused to let his lineage dictate his morality, especially when it was known for its contempt for human lives. He trained to be a great warrior, but he never wanted to fall into the view of seeing people as pawns, seeing lives as expendable.

He was proud of who he had become, the nation he had built in a short span of time, but he could never be proud of where he came from.

That dilemma was what led him across an ocean to Netherite's castle, wielding an axe into the

throne room, where the king sat, dressed in a black suit. Technoblade stared at the lines on Schlatt's face as he stormed forward, the dark indentations extending from under his eyes to just above his cheekbones. The distinct features of Netherians, to be cursed with nasty marks that looked like scars since birth.

"I didn't expect you to come here." Schlatt rose from his throne, an unreadable expression on his imperfect face. "All alone. Through the guards out front, no less. I'm impressed."

Techno kept walking, through the grand doors of the throne room, up the first layer of steps. When he realised the masked man had no intentions of stopping, Schlatt tried to keep his composure, but it was clear that a physical confrontation was not something he had prepared for. He had nothing on him.

"Woah, woah! No need to come up all angry-like. We're civil men, surely we can talk about this," Schlatt said with a nervous laugh.

"You have the balls to put the lives of my people at risk." Techno snarled, tossing his shield to the side. "To try and *annex* my country." The tainted battle-axe was lifted over his shoulder, and the rage was practically emanating from him. Schlatt was serious now, grabbing a shield hidden from under the throne. "And now look at you. Without your men, you hold no power."

With a simple swing of the broad, weighted axe, the shield was knocked from the king's hands, and within a minute, the well-dressed man was bruised and tackled to the ground. Despite not having the upper hand, seeing the fire in Technoblade's eyes somehow made him feel a flash of pride, confidence.

"*Alright*, alright," Schlatt hissed under the weight of Techno's foot on his chest. He let out a bloody cough. The drying blood on the brute's boot smudged onto the king's shirt. "Get it over with, already."

Technoblade looked down at him, only now catching his breath. He had his arm extended, the flat blade of the axe pressed under the king's chin. He hesitated, and it appeared he waited too long, as Schlatt let out a laugh, voice coarse as gravel.

"You can't do it, can you?"

Techno carefully lifted the hog mask over his head and tossed it to the side, revealing his features. Pressing the blunt centre of the axe down onto the king's throat, he caused the king to cough and forced him to look up at him. Grimacing from the pressure on his windpipe, Schlatt didn't have the chance to smile at the sight. The black Netherian marks that matched his own, and bright red irises staring back at him. When Techno finally eased the weight of the blunt metal edge of the axe, Schlatt let out a broken laugh, a disgusting grin on his face.

"Welcome home, Netherian."

Then the pressure on his chest felt heavier, almost crushing, Schlatt's grin never left. If this is how he'd die, he knew it would be worth it to see Techno's high-and-mighty resolve crack to show who he really was; A brute with a bloodlust. *A Netherian.*

But Techno refused to give him the satisfaction.

"I'm not going to kill you. But you're going to call off your troops," he stated calmly, lifting the blade again so the sharp edge was pressed to Schlatt's throat. Whether it was a threat or a promise, he wasn't sure. "You're going to leave me and my people alone, or next time you won't be so

lucky. I'm not going to kill you, but you're gonna wish that I gave you the mercy."

Schlatt looked up at him, eyes half-lidded and unimpressed, but he didn't argue.

"You're making a mistake. You belong in the Nether, it's in your blood. It's in your eyes. You can't pretend forever," Schlatt taunted, a sickening tone in his voice. "Look, I'll make it easy for you. I'll close my eyes if you don't wanna watch the life drain outta me. *Kill me*, take my country. You're clearly worthy of so much more than a little fuckin' plot of land in a continent bound to crumble."

And Schlatt did just that, closing his eyes, waiting for a blow that never came, waiting to meet his maker with open arms.

But all he got was Techno lifting his foot off of his chest, the cool blade disappearing from his skin. When he opened his eyes, he watched as Techno made his way towards the door, his cape trailing behind him and hiding the silhouette of his armour. The pig mask had been picked up, and the axe was tucked in its holster by his waist.

"I'll never be like you."

Dream's eyelids were heavy that morning. A meeting with the advisors the night before had gone down rough. When raising the potential issues that came with sending Diamond the Dust, he had predicted the committee would be a little difficult to convince, given their traditional way of doing things and their hopes to maintain his father's plans and legacy. However, it was more brutal than he had expected, with his committee rarely taking in a word he said, and repeating the points he had already countered, insisting he 'hadn't thought them through enough.

He decided it was probably best to introduce some fresh blood into the advisory committee eventually, so he wasn't arguing alone with a bunch of old geezers who couldn't keep an open mind to opposing viewpoints and new ways of doing things. But that was an issue for another day.

The meeting adjourned past midnight, with the king having gained no insights into the pros and cons that he hadn't already been aware of. A late night in meant that he had fewer hours of sleep before his Thursday morning training. Moreover, with George coming over later that day, he probably wouldn't be at his peak. He wasn't all too worried, though. Something about the prince's company gave him the energy of a week's worth of sleep. He could never be short with that man or look at him with anything less than admiration.

After his training, as he sat having breakfast with Tubbo seated across from him. The boy was whittling, a cloth underneath to collect the mess of wooden bedding it formed. It had started to take form, revealing a rather detailed owl, and Dream smiled softly as he watched the heart and soul that he had put into it.

"It's coming along well," the king noted between his bites of bacon. Tubbo glanced up briefly. "All that work's really paying off."

"Thank you. Niki's helped a lot with teaching me how to hold the knife right."

"That's great, can't even tell this is your first one."

"Oh, it's not," Tubbo laughed. "This is my third try. I kept carving too much at a time, the previous

ones ended up tiny and misshapen, so I had to try again."

Dream laughed as well. He was surprised he hadn't noticed, though it made sense why over a week's worth of whittling didn't shrink a piece of wood. Tubbo had been working on it every free moment he had.

"Well, the craft shows. It looks like it's almost done."

"It is. My little sister is going to love it," he said with a soft smile. "Her birthday's today."

Dream's fork halted midway to his mouth and he paused, looking up at the boy with an alarmed expression.

"Today? Tubbo, you should be home celebrating, why didn't you say anything?" Dream scolded lightly.

"I was going to ask you if I could take tomorrow off to take her out for a picnic, actually," he admitted. "But I got nervous. I don't want to trouble you."

"Tubbo, go home," the king spoke gently, a soft smile on his face. "You can take the rest of the day off, and the next three days even if you want."

Tubbo's eyes lit up, wide and surprised.

"Three? But Prince George is coming later, surely I should be around to make sure he's comfortable."

"There're plenty of hands around to do that. Besides, it's just a visit. I'll be fine," Dream assured, finishing up the last of his food. "Finish the gift and then head home to spend time with your family."

The boy looked up at Dream, the widest smile on his face.

"Thank you, really."

"Of course. Just tell me next time, idiot."

Tubbo laughed bashfully, continuing his work.

"I will."

As he made his way out of the dining room, he ruffled Tubbo's hair gently, a smile on his face.

"I'll see you in a few days."

The castle felt emptier without Tubbo fussing and keeping him company. This time, when George arrived at the tall white gates, a guard was present to greet him and take him to Dream. The prince was tentative as he was lead to the sitting area again, where the king was finishing up the tea. Upon hearing the door open, Dream stood up, greeting the prince with a bow and a smile.

"My prince. Thank you for joining me today."

"Of course," George said quietly, almost tentatively. Something about his aura that day was different, Dream noticed. "I haven't had the chance to thank you for your offer—"

Dream cut him off gently, his hand raised with somewhat of a grimace on his face, though it was hidden from the prince.

"No need to thank me yet. Just... I wish to spend time with *you*. Just you. Kingdoms, titles, nothing of the sort."

George was surprised by this, and flashes of his dream a few nights before playing behind his eyes. No titles, no pressures. He could do that.

"If that's the case... You mentioned white flowers? I want to see them."

Dream grinned at this response. He held his hand out, and hesitantly, George accepted it, the touch of calloused fingers against his own feeling more and more familiar each time.

"Of course. They're beautiful, honestly, and I know beauty when I see it."

George wasn't sure how they ended up there, but they soon found themselves in a section of a garden, walls of shrubbery keeping the nook hidden. It was quaint, smaller than he'd expected. The bench they were sitting on was suspended under a sturdy tree branch, swaying slightly to his movements. Before them, rows of white rose bushes lined the area. Not just the petals, but the stems and the leaves were the same quartz-like shade. There was nothing of the sort down in Diamond, so he looked on in amazement.

And in his hands was one of its kind, plucked and de-thorned carefully by the king himself. The prince looked at it intently. The petals were soft, almost like cotton. He ran his thumb along the slightly darker spots on the stem, where the spines used to be.

"Why do you do that?" He asked absentmindedly, tucking his legs up.

"Hm?" Dream hummed, shaken from his thoughts.

"The thorns. You always pick them off. Why do you do that?"

The mask proved to be useful once again, hiding the faint blush that rose on the king's cheeks. He hesitated, though he already had an answer. George was still on guard, his walls not yet lowered, but he was getting to a comfortable state. Dream could tell from the way his shoulders slumped slightly, leaning against the backrest of the swing. The way his tone wasn't forced and laced with professionalism. Before he could overthink it, the words slipped from his lips.

"I didn't want them to prick you."

The prince wasn't sure what to make of it. The alarms in his head that went off, telling him that Dream looked down on him, were ever-present, but he took a conscious effort to drown them out. He ignored the surface-level inhibitions that voiced doubts on Dream's motivations, and instead listened deeper to the part of him that thought it was simply a sweet gesture.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "You know, I'm fine. You don't have to—"

"I know," Dream interjected quickly. "I... just wanted to."

A strange silence fell over them, with none of them knowing where to take the conversation from there. They were sitting on words they couldn't say, or rather, didn't dare to say. Both were seemingly only aware of their own uncertainty, not realising that they were in the same boat.

Looking back, George realised that he had no past conversations to draw on. He had told Dream about his painting, told him his favourite thing for breakfast, showed him his happy place. Dream knew so much about him, and he felt like an asshole for not paying much mind to him. The king had sent supplies and he barely bothered to get to know him.

"I never asked you much about you," George said quietly.

Dream, who had also fallen back into his head, looked up at George, surprised.

"Hm? What d'you mean?"

"I don't know, I never asked about you this whole time."

"I never noticed. I guess I've just... wanted to know about *you*," Dream admitted. "What do you wanna know?"

This was uncharted territory for them. Dream watched once again as George's walls lowered, but rather than sitting where they once towered around him, he was reaching, hand out, a tentative step forward. It made him anxious, almost, knowing George was right there, before him, and he wasn't sure what was going on in his head.

"I'm not sure. All I really know is that you spar and train a lot," George said quietly. He was scared, almost. "Tell me what you like to do, what makes you happy."

George had put himself in quite a vulnerable spot with that question. He wasn't sure why, it was a probe at Dream, and he was asking, not telling. Being open to listening like this would probably be the first time he had actually verbalised that he had any interest in finding out who Dream was as a person. Sure, he had always been a little curious to know if his reputation and first impression of the man was at all accurate to him, but his uncertainty prevented him from mentioning it to anyone, even Sapnap.

Meanwhile, Dream was thinking hard about that. What did make him happy? He wasn't sure if 'happy' was a state he would consider himself to be often. Not that he was upset or anything, he simply felt neutral most of the time, especially the days he was away from most people. When Tubbo was spending his off days with his family, or in Gold with Tommy.

"I guess like people. I hold my friends close, take care of them in any way I can. I can spend hours with Technoblade or Tubbo, just sitting in silence and talking about nothing when we both have the time. The company keeps me content."

"Tubbo's a nice kid," George hummed in agreement. "A little young to be a servant, though. He couldn't be older than 15, surely."

"He's actually 16," Dream said with a quiet laugh. A soft rumble that George had never heard before, at least not in the way it came out. "He's a good kid, I don't make him do things. He wants to help out, and I show him how."

"That's nice, I'm glad he's taken care of." George looked down at his hands, rolling the flower by its white stem between his index and thumb. "What else do you like then, other than people? That just sounds to me like you're human."

"I like fire," Dream said, sounding a little unsure. "The crackles, the warmth. I used to sit in the library, by the fireplace, and just write."

"You write?" George asked, his interest piqued. He glanced over at the masked man, noticing how he wasn't looking back at him for once.

"I used to. Poems and stuff, but that was forever ago. They weren't very good."

George had never pegged Dream as the creative type. His letters were eloquent, but it never particularly struck out to him. With some people, their flair shone through their words, mannerisms. Spending ten minutes with Wilbur would probably be enough for someone to know that he creates beautiful art and wonderful music. You could see it in your eyes, hear it in his voice. Dream, on the other hand, who often had his sword on his hip and his mask firmly attached, held a different aura.

Without realising, George leaned in to listen.

"What were they about?"

Dream felt his face flush gently. He remembered his poems, but he wasn't sure if it was something he was quite ready to share with George just yet. He had only granted Technoblade the privilege of reading his old writing, and since their themes were far from platonic, it felt strange to tell George too much. Bringing up a past lover to the man he wanted to court felt counter-intuitive.

The truth was, a large portion of his poems were freeform, created as an outlet to express his admiration for a boy he used to love. Sure, some were about his mother's passing, the pressures of a Kingdom relying on him as a young prince and sole heir to the throne, his loathing for his father. But mostly, he found joy in amplifying his happier emotions through his quill.

He hadn't written much since his coronation. He didn't have much reason to.

"A bunch of things. I wrote about things that made me feel, I guess. Responsibility, love, death... Anything I needed to."

The prince couldn't help the smile that rose to his face. It was the thought of Dream in his study, working with his quill the way George did with his paintbrushes, and creating the world through his eyes that bridged the gap between him and his perception of the king next to me.

"That's... really neat. I'm glad you have that sort of outlet like I do with painting. Maybe you're not just the cold warrior you make yourself to be," George said with a light-hearted, yet genuine tone.

They were quiet again for a bit, so Dream decided to continue.

"Maybe I could show you someday."

George smiled softly again, feeling his heart flutter at the thought of Dream sharing something so intimate. This time, he didn't try to quell his emotions. He simply let himself be swayed, allowed the tremble in his stomach and the blush on his cheeks to take him to heights he dared not explore. It was the beginning of something different for them, something full of potential.

"I'd like that."

"You did good today, son," King Philza said with a warm smile, patting Wilbur on the back and causing his heart to swell with pride.

They had just ended a meeting with some representatives from Redstone, and Wilbur really held his own. He was proving himself to be more and more ready each day. While they had differing ideas on how things should be carried out, he could see how Wilbur's ideals were focused on what was best for his people, rather than what was convenient. Even though Wilbur lacked the experiences to understand why certain policies wouldn't be practical, Phil found great pride and comfort in the fact that he had raised him well.

"Thank you. I sure hope I did. If I made a mistake, it's going straight back to Redstone and I know Eret's going to jump on it," Wilbur remarked, causing Phil to laugh.

"Come on now, don't speak ill of the man. He's a difficult lad to work with, sure, but he cares just like you do."

"Yeah, well, his end doesn't justify his means," Wilbur muttered, despite the smile on his face. "But don't worry, I know how to keep things civil. I'm a big boy now."

"You *are* a big boy. Much taller than me, as well, which is pretty annoying, if I'm honest."

This drew a laugh from Wilbur.

"It's alright, dad, maybe one day you'll be as tall as I am."

As Wilbur looked up from where his hands sorted through the papers, Phil looked at him with a strange look on his face that he couldn't quite read. Glancing down at his outfit briefly to see if there was something on his shirt, Wilbur asked, "What?"

"What?" Phil asked innocently, tilting his head.

"You're starin' at me funny."

"It's just, you're a big boy and eventually, that comes with big boy priorities," the King began nonchalantly as he finished drying off his quill. "And that's not such a bad thing, it's just--"

"C'mon, dad, what are you playing at?" Wilbur urged with a laugh, amused by how he was behaving.

"I'm not playing at anything, calm down. I just... know that you're coming to the age where you're going to start looking for a suitress soon, and I wanted to know if you'd like to throw a banquet of sorts."

Wilbur knew what was going on. While Phil was subtle, Wilbur had learnt all he knew about subtlety from the man himself. Surely Phil had noticed the moments he'd slip away with his friend in secret, and maybe he'd seen the paintings lining his study of his favourite muse and, more recently, his closest confidant. It would be easy to misinterpret the situation. Besides, he couldn't blame his father for wanting some clarity, especially not since he seemed to ask for clarification instead of jumping to conclusions. In fact, he was grateful.

"Maybe not so soon, but I would like that eventually. My heart is still in my art and learning, and I couldn't possibly bring a maiden into my life before I've settled those aspects. It would be unfair to her."

Phil simply nodded, a respectful smile on his face. He picked up on Wilbur's answer pretty easily.

"Of course. Well, let me know when so I can make the necessary preparations." Phil stood up, tucking his quill away. "Oh, and by the way, Techno and Niki should be arriving this evening, if you'd like to help them get settled in. You didn't hear this from me, but Techno's still a tiny bit apprehensive about the whole thing, so give him some support, yeah?"

"Of course. Anything for family."

With that, Wilbur took his leave, deciding to rest before then. He looked forward to seeing not only his best friend, but his brother. It was still a strange fact to get used to, but they got along with Techno so well that it made sense. It was like they were always brothers, and it just took a little while longer to find him.

As he was returning to his quarters, he bumped into Tommy, who had two wooden swords in his hands. He appeared to be heading back to his room to put them away.

"Hey, dickhead," he greeted his younger brother, reaching over to give him a pat on the head. Tommy let him, though he looked a little distracted.

"Shut up, I'm not a dickhead. You're a dickhead," he barked back, with no bite to his words. Sensing the lack of enthusiasm, Wilbur frowned gently.

"You're a bit off today. What happened?"

Tommy motioned to the swords he was dual-wielding, his brows knitted together in concern. It wasn't a sight that Wilbur saw often.

"Tubbo didn't come by today."

"So? He's probably busy. He has jobs to do, you know," Wilbur clicked his tongue, trying to ease his concern.

"He always sends a letter when he can't come. He didn't send a letter yesterday." Tommy cleared his throat, puffing his chest out slightly. "Not that I'm *worried* or anything! Big men don't get worried about things and I'm the *biggest* man. I'm just... annoyed that he blew me off."

Wilbur sighed, readjusting the crown on his younger brother's head. It had gone lopsided when Wilbur messed his hair up before.

"Tommy, big men have the *most* to be worried about. You should know that, you're a big man. I can tell because you *are* worried. Look, why don't you send a letter over tomorrow? Maybe you can visit him in Emerald for once."

Tommy scrunched his face up, but his mood did seem to lighten up a bit. They walked up the stairs to the direction of their rooms, their bickering bringing life to the white and gold hallways.

"With Dream? That'd be weird."

"Why would that be weird?"

"Cause he's Dream. Dude's got no face."

"Techno's got no face."

"He does, I've seen it! Besides, he's like Tubbo's scary older sibling, I don't wanna hang out with

him around."

"Tubbo deals with dad and me all the time."

"Yeah but that's different, innit."

"It's literally not-"

"It is!"

"What, am I not cool enough to be scary?"

"You are the least cool person I know-"

The sun leaves kisses on your cheeks

In the form of speckled rays of light,

And leaving behind spots, freckled and bright.

The ocean's tide, my vessel leaks

Crashing into murky depths below,

Where our lips may meet at last, warm and slow

Oh, demigod, your beauty transcends this world,

And I thank the stars that I wasn't born in the next one

Because this feels like the start of a universe on its own,

Where you twist and unravel me, where I come undone.

-Dream

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for over 4k hits! I hope you enjoyed the chapter, this fic as going by much quicker than I expected, and I'm so grateful for all the support. Leave a kudos if you liked it, and let me know how this one made you feel! As always, I appreciate

constructive feedback.

The Beginning

Chapter Summary

After the Emerald visit, it seemed as though things were looking up. The nations come together under less-than-ideal circumstances.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The two laid on a picnic blanket facing each other. Their knees barely bumped against each other, and the late autumn breeze blew through their hair, leaving it lightly tousled. They could hear the quiet rustle of the tree they were under. Dream was staring at George's face, stray tufts of hair falling over his forehead oh-so-gently. He was like an angel, too beautiful for this world. He could barely believe that he was the luckiest man in the world, blessed with the absolute privilege of breathing the same air as him.

And laying across from him, Dream wanted to bear his heart out. Tell him everything he wanted to know, give him everything he could ever ask for, grow a garden of the prettiest flowers that were worthy enough to be presented to him. He wanted to make George the happiest one could be, and he would do anything to see that smile again and again.

"And what did you say to him?" The quiet voice asked, a smile still lingering on his lips from when they laughed before.

"I told him exactly what was on my mind. That he was a fool for thinking I would let him speak to me like that. One kick to the nuts and he was off my back."

This sent George through another fit of giggles, to which Dream couldn't help but join him. Their voices were like a symphony, harmonizing together to the rhythm only they could hear. This time, George managed to drown out the static and he couldn't be more content with what he heard.

"Sounds like you were quite the problem child," George teased lightly.

"I mean, wouldn't say *that*. I'd like to think I had some *problematic* circumstances," Dream countered, a cheeky grin on his face.

"Oh yeah? Like what?"

"My dad was a *dick*. Like, the biggest asshole around. Always so uptight about the dumbest things."

"I'll bet you didn't make things easy for him," George said lightheartedly.

"*Fuck no*, I gave him a hard time, as he deserved!" Dream said, drawing another warm laugh from George. He shifted to lay on his back and looked up at the clouds as he continued, voice sounding less boisterous than before. "Y'know, you're lucky. Your parents seem to care a great deal about you. My dad... He barely acted like a father to me."

George watched him, his mask hiding his face but his tone and body language revealing all he

needed to know. He had heard about the last king, and how he was a stern ruler. From hearsay, he knew that he wasn't the most loving father, especially after the death of his wife. Still, George hadn't considered how this might have impacted Dream growing up.

"I'm sorry to hear that," he said gently, a hand reaching out to gently squeeze the man's forearm. This made Dream look over, thankful that his mask covered the way his pupils dilated and cheeks flushed. "I don't know much about him, but it does sound like he was a bit of a dick."

"Yeah. There's this one time..." He trailed off, hesitating. "Sorry, that one's a long story."

George tugged gently on his arm, almost pouting.

"No, no, go on."

Dream bit his lip gently, turning onto his side again and watching the cute expression on his face.

"There was this one time, I was out by the water. We were sitting on a dock. There was a boy, around my age, a tailor. We used to talk every other night and just listen to the waves crash. He'd sew together some scrap fabric and stuff them with cotton he could get his hands on for me, and I'd write him little poems, letters, stuff like that. I was around 18 at the time, I think my birthday had just passed. My father noticed I kept sneaking out, so he had some guards follow me one night."

Dream watched the way George's expression shift from heartwarming to concerned. His brows furrowed slightly and Dream gently pulled his forearm from his grip. Instead, he tentatively laced their fingers together, internally heaving a content sigh as the boy's slender fingers closed around his knuckles.

"I know, terrible, right? So we were talking, like usual, and then I had my first kiss. It was meaningful and exciting and magical... until we felt footsteps on the pier. We turned around and these guards were making their way over to us. One of them had a weapon on his hip, and understandably, he was terrified. They put him in chains and when I tried to fight back, the guard pushed me and I fell face-first into the corner of one of the wooden pillars and cut my nose. Like, really badly. But they just dragged me back to the castle after that, kicking and screaming and bleeding all over. I never got to say my goodbyes, but I wasn't allowed to talk to him again or he'd be imprisoned for treason."

"That's horrible. Treason?" George asked incredulously.

"Apparently he was being a distraction, and 'encouraging my rebellious behaviour'. It's so stupid."

"And your face? Did he care at all?"

Dream paused then. He carefully lifted the bone mask from his face, his eyes closed at first. George looked on, seeing the way diffused light cast a shadow on his face. Where he mentioned, a white scar crossed the bridge of his nose, even reaching his cheekbone. It was long, messy and clearly wasn't taken care of enough to heal well. He let out a quiet exhale, feeling his heart swell with sympathy, and it definitely looked painful. He reached out, gently cupping his cheek and brushing his thumb along the white line. The skin flushed a faint shade of pink under his touch, but the lighting made it hard to see for sure. Dream slowly opened his eyes, a little afraid to see George's reaction to it.

"He said it was one of the 'consequences of my actions'. Didn't give a shit."

Dream's eyes were green, George noticed. Finally, he had something to look into.

They say that someone's eyes are the windows to their soul. And until the very moment their eyes met, that phrase didn't mean much to him. The hours and hours he had spent thinking about Dream, trying to figure out who he was couldn't compare to the man he saw before him. Kind, vulnerable, and perfectly flawed. Beyond the reflection of himself that he saw in those emerald irises was a man bearing his soul out to him, scared and hand outreached, speckles of different shades telling tales of trust and love and loss. The most vulnerable he had ever felt was when he looked into his eyes.

"I think he was a fool," George said softly.

The rest of the evening passed by with ease, the same warmth shared between them. When the blank, carved smile of a mask brought him to his quarters that night to rest, all George could think about was the warm eyes that were hiding behind it. And when he slipped into a slumber that night, the man at the creek finally had a face to him.

"Tell me again why you want to do this."

The black knight piece moved from its spot safely nestled amongst its pawns into the crossfire. A white rook stared it down, waiting to step forward and swallow it whole.

"I want him dead," Alex said simply, a smirk on his face. "I want to humiliate him the way he did me. I want him to know what it's like to lose for once, that motherfucker doesn't know who he's dealing with. He thinks he's won, but he hasn't."

Schlatt let out a chuckle, watching as Alex made his next move. A direct attack on his knight, which he hadn't predicted. This left Alex's bishop vulnerable, and Schlatt let out a neutral hum, taking note of the bold move.

"Right. However -and, I hope I don't offend you with this one, but- Emerald's defeated you before. What makes you think you can win this time 'round?'"

Alex took a sip of his whiskey, looking into the other Netherian's dark red eyes.

"This time, we have leverage, don't we?"

Schlatt shrugged, making his next move one of defence.

"We'll have to wait and see. We don't know if one servant boy is enough to bring the King of Emeralds to his knees."

"If he doesn't prove useful, we'll just have to go with Plan B, strike like a lightning bolt. They won't even see it coming."

Schlatt let out a quiet laugh, observing Alex for a moment.

"Bit of an ego on you, huh?" the brunette man teased, causing Alex to laugh, a smirk playing on his lips.

"Me? I suppose. But it's gotten me this far, hasn't it?"

The quiet clink of glass as Alex put his whiskey down filled the now-silent room. He stared at the

board, considering his next moves. Schlatt watched him, the way the marks on his cheeks folded with his skin as he pursed his lips. He could tell Alex was a little stuck, clearly expecting his bishop to be taken as a sacrifice. When expectations were subverted, though, he remained resourceful, taking a better look at the board. He shrugged and moved his bishop closer, forcing it within reach of a measly pawn. Schlatt raised his brows in surprise but decided to keep his thoughts to himself.

“What do you want out of it?” Alex asked, leaning back after his seemingly pointless move.

“I want The Nether to grow,” he said simply. “I want the continent to expand, I want to take us to new heights. The Emerald-Obsidian-Gold region will be under our thumb, and the rest of the continent will tumble like dominos. We’ll just have to find an in.”

A firm knock on the door interrupted their conversation.

“Come in.”

A group of 10 or so armoured men, at least a hulking 6’4 each, marched in, dragging along a prisoner. He had a sack over his head, and from the muffled sounds of protests, he was gagged underneath it. His arms were bound behind his back and he had scrapes on his knees from where he was handled against the concrete ground during his capture. The small frame was trembling, afraid and unsure of where he had been the past few hours.

Schlatt rose from his seat, taking a few steps closer.

“The servant boy from Emerald, Your Highness.”

The bag was ripped from his head and the gag undone. Tubbo was shoved forward, stumbling to his wounded knees once again, which made him grimace. He looked around, taking in his surroundings quickly. It was a completely foreign land, and from the dryness in the air, he could tell he was nowhere near where he last remembered. Looking up, his terrified eyes met with the cold, red irises of the King of Netherite himself.

"Thank you, gentlemen."

He waved them off, and they dismissed themselves, the clunking of armour stopping outside the door which closed behind them. The man crouched, reaching eye-level with the terrified boy.

"Hi," Schlatt spoke, voice taking on an unsettlingly sweet tone. When Tubbo didn't respond, he sighed quietly.

"What's your name?" He urged gently, trying to coax something, anything out of him. It seemed like he wasn't going to answer, and he was getting ready to stand up again, when a quiet voice spoke.

"Tubbo."

Schlatt smiled, his temper easing.

"Good, good. Nice to meet you, Tubbo. Do you know who I am?"

Tubbo could only nod slightly, not trusting his voice to respond. It didn't feel right to speak, for some reason.

"That's great. And do you know who my friend here is?"

Tubbo looked over his shoulder, where the King of Blackstone sat, leaned back into his chair. His whiskey glass was in his hand and he gave the trembling boy a salute and a grin that could mean nothing good. Tubbo looked back up at Schlatt and nodded again.

"Are you going to hurt me?" The young boy asked timidly, tugging at his restraints gently. They didn't budge.

Schlatt laughed quietly.

"No, looks like they were already a little rough with you. Sorry about that," Schlatt said, licking his thumb and gently brushing dirt from a graze on his cheekbone that he didn't realise he had. The pressure made him wince slightly. "I just need some information from you, is all."

"Please, please I can't tell you anything," Tubbo begged as Schlatt stood up, taking his seat back at the table. He pushed out a chair gently with his foot.

"Come here, take a seat. Can you stand up?"

Tubbo tried, wobbling as his arms weren't free to help with his balance. He managed to stand, though, and tentatively stepped closer. Schlatt motioned to the seat and he sat down at the edge of the seat.

"Good. So, we've got some eyes of you bringing supplies down from Emerald the other week. The little birdie couldn't follow you, though. Why don't you go on and tell us where you were headed with a carriage that size?"

Schlatt made his next move, noticing that a piece had shifted without him knowing. Alex had tampered with the board, moving pieces around while his back was turned. Regardless, he pretended not to notice.

"I can't, please. You can't-"

"Tubbo, was it? Sorry, I think he missed out some points so if I could just cut in," Alex interrupted his pleads, already bored. He set his whiskey down. "Our little birdie *did* manage to get eyes on you heading to a little house in the woods. Quaint, had two people in it, alongside a live-in helper. A lovely old lady and a little girl, from what I've heard." Tubbo's blood ran cold at the mention of his family. Alex leaned in closer, staring him down with red eyes that dug into his soul. "It would be a shame if anything were to happen with Emerald. They'd probably be within the boundaries of the crossfire."

Alex raised a brow at Tubbo expectantly, waiting for a response. The blood drained from the boy's face, the indirect threat doing measures to crumble his determination to hold his tongue. His lip trembled, and he clearly didn't know what to do. He was torn between betraying his king, his best friend, and putting his family, his own flesh and blood at risk. Tears filled his eyes.

"Surely there's a better way of doing this. King Dream is a reasonable man who cares about his people, I urge you to reconsider."

Schlatt spoke, pulling him from his thoughts.

"Listen, Tubbo. We're going to do this whether you're with us or not. But let me tell ya something, kid, it's a lot easier to reduce collateral when we know what we're workin' with," Schlatt cut in, the gentle tone giving way to a more serious one, though equally as calm. "Now, if you don't answer our questions, we're not gonna go out and hurt your family or anything. That would be cruel. But if we can do this avoiding any direct conflict, sparing us the men, we're gonna take it. So, what do

you say?"

Tubbo's lip trembled, a lump growing in his throat. Alex had been a thorn in Dream's side, but alone, he was weak. Yet here he was, paired with the most powerful country in the continent. The chances of Emerald making it out alone with the size of their army were slim.

"You promise nobody needs to die?"

"If your information is useful enough, I promise that innocent people won't be put in harm's way."

"Diamond. I was headed to Diamond," Tubbo said quietly, bowing his head. He didn't dare look either of them in the eye, ashamed of the decision he was forced to make. A tear that had been threatening to fall for minutes finally slid down his cheek.

"Why? I'm gonna need the full story," Schlatt said simply, the calm voice taking on an edge, with the threat by Alex looming over them.

"I was sending supplies to help Diamond, as per Dream's request." When Schlatt stared at him, unimpressed, he continued. "Dream has taken a liking to Prince George, and he wants to help Diamond tide over the winter."

Alex scoffed.

"So what, Dream has a little infatuation? Surely there's something more than that," he remarked, seemingly unsatisfied.

"He's more than just infatuated," Tubbo mumbled.

"And what makes you say that?"

"He wants to send Diamond The Dust."

The pin-drop silence was almost deafening, making the clink of a whiskey glass being set down loud enough to make Tubbo flinch. He gulped quietly, feeling deadly terrified, not only of disappointing Dream for letting out this secret that Dream had made him promise not to tell anyone, but of possibly putting someone in danger.

"Techno, tell us about him," Schlatt pushed, leaning forward. "Everything you know, and I mean *everything*."

"I-I don't know—"

"Tubbo," Schlatt cut off, tone hauntingly calm. "The collateral would be on your head."

"He's with Gold," Tubbo blurted out, clenching his eyes shut. "Obsidian and Gold are having a merger early winter. Techno is living with the Watsons. He's like family to them. Bordering with Diamond, they've grown closer too. Wilbur and George, specifically."

They stared intensely. The look on the Netharians' faces gave him the sinking feeling that they weren't going to keep to their words fully. Regret filled him as he wondered whether or not he made the right decision. Regardless, he couldn't take it back, all he could do was beg.

"That's enough for now, I think. Thank you, Tubbo," Schlatt said, a grin on his face.

"Please don't hurt them," he croaked out, but Schlatt clapped his hands twice, the guards filing the room again to drag Tubbo out of his chair and towards the door.

“Don’t worry, they’ll be here soon enough. Thanks again, you’ve been so very helpful.”

“Please! Please, don’t hurt anyone!” He was kicking and yelling now, not knowing where he would be taken next and who would be hurt because of his decision. He continued to be dragged off, his voice echoing down the hallway until the door shut behind them.

Schlatt grinned, turning over to Alex who shot back a similar expression. They raised their whiskey glasses and clinked them together quietly.

"Diamond, huh? Looks like we have an in."

The past few days felt strange without Tubbo. The boy had taken days off before, checking in to make sure his mother was managing well with the maid and that his sister was coping with school alright. But this was the first time he'd spent half a week without Tubbo. He was meant to return the day before, but he didn't show up. Mildly concerned, Dream sent someone to visit and make sure Tubbo was alright.

Still, Dream was over the moon. He and George had gone back and forth with letters since his Emerald visit four days ago. Their relationship had blossomed, and to the level of vulnerability they were able to show each other, the thumping in his chest had begun to quicken each time a letter arrived at the castle, eager to read everything the man wanted to share.

This time, though, the letter that arrived at his door wasn't one he had quite expected. The seal was dark red, instead of the light blue he was used to. The symbol on it was the same polygonal diamond, indicating that the exact same stamp had been used. The difference in wax was the first sign that something was amiss.

Opening it brought about a sinking feeling, as he realised the handwriting was completely unfamiliar to him. Gripping the letter tightly, the words were a blur to him, yet certain words and phrases stuck out to him.

George. Captured. Surrender Emerald immediately. Netherite.

Within minutes, he was dressed in full armour and out the door, climbing onto his fastest steed with his sword on his hip. As he sped down the beaten roads towards the Kingdom of Gold, he missed the wooden owl tucked under a bush, having tumbled out days ago.

Thoughts were swimming through Dream’s head and he was drowning in them. A mantra of ‘*George needs to be okay*’ playing over and over again, and conflicting feelings of fear, rage, guilt, all culminating into the tense, stern expression on his face. He worried for George, unsure what Schlatt would do to the prince, how he would be treated as a prisoner. Schlatt was a hard man to read, and he had never had any personal conflicts with them, so this came out of the blue. However, with his growing friendship with Technoblade, he should have figured that he would be pulled into the political tensions between Obsidian and Netherite. And maybe if he wasn’t so reckless, George wouldn’t be dragged into this situation too.

He didn’t even know how word got to Schlatt of their meetings, he hadn’t heard from the man since after the Emerald ball. Not only that, but he began to question if he had something to do with Tubbo’s disappearance. He didn’t have the chance to wait for word to come back from the guard he had sent to check up on him, he needed to get to Gold and then Diamond, if needed, as soon as

possible.

“Philza!” Dream yelled urgently as he arrived at the golden gates. A set of horses were parked out the front, with four guards dressed in Diamond’s uniform standing by them, leaving one horse unmanned. This quelled any doubts that the letter was a bluff, and solidified the fact that something was seriously wrong. The pit in his stomach felt heavier.

The commotion of galloping horses brought the attention of Wilbur and Tommy, who opened the doors. With a grave expression, Wilbur waved off the guards who were on alert as they saw the weapon Dream brought around. Tommy walked past the doors, face holding that of worry.

“Dream? Why isn’t Tubbo with you?”

The king climbed off his horse, tying the lead to one of the pillars of the banister, before walking up quickly.

“That’s what I’m here to figure out.”

“Diamond’s advisor just arrived, he’s in the meeting room with them right now,” Wilbur explained urgently, holding the door open for him. “I’ll show you the way.”

“Who knows about George?” Dream asked, walking in and following in stride.

“King and Queen Davidson were distraught after finding a letter, so their advisor came by on their behalf, he just arrived an hour ago. Techno and Niki are in there with Phil.”

“Wait wait, what do you mean by ‘figure out’? Is he okay, where is he?” Tommy asked, following behind and breaking into a slight jog to keep up with them.

“Tommy, we don’t know anything yet. We’ll talk to the others and figure out what we all know about the situation,” Wilbur spoke over his shoulder, looking over at his brother empathetically but maintaining focus. “Wait outside.”

“No, I want to know what’s going on! My friend might be in trouble, Will. I need to know.”

They had arrived at the door now, and Dream had just entered, joining the others at the table facing Phil. Wilbur looked at Tommy for a moment, hearing the conviction in his tone and seeing the fire in his eyes, and he sighed, holding the door open for him.

“Fine, but don’t interrupt the flow of conversation,” he said quietly, to which Tommy nodded.

There were seven at the table now, including a man Dream had never met before, but he could only assume this was the advisor Wilbur was talking about. Dream’s eyes drifted to the opened envelope sitting in front of him. He gave a curt nod to the man, who nodded back, a silent, mutual agreement of a shared goal. They shook hands.

“King Dream, my name’s Nick and I’ll be acting as the representative of Diamond for today.”

Dream recalled that name being brought up just a few days ago. George had mentioned a friend he grew up with, which he called Sapnap when nobody was around. With how serious the man looked, there was no doubt in his mind that the prince’s kidnapping meant more to him than politics, and he was pretty sure this was the advisor his George was talking about.

“Thank you Nick. I’m glad things are moving, then. Phil, Techno,” he nodded in their directions, leaning forward in his seat. “So, what do we know and what’s our plan?”

“Glad you came, Dream. We were wondering if you’d heard the news, but it looks like you came before we had to go get you. Nick’s going to fill you in on what we know,” Phil took charge of the conversation, and Nick handed the letter over to Dream to read. He skimmed through it as Nick began his explanation.

“George wasn’t in his bedroom this morning. Nothing was stolen and the bed was made, but George was nowhere to be found and this letter was on his desk.”

Similar to the one Dream had, it spoke of a capture. However, the demands made were directed at Gold instead of Diamond himself. It had the same sentiment - surrender or George would remain in Netherite until further notice.

This wasn’t a war waged on Emerald, this was a war waged on all of them.

“And how did you find out?” Wilbur asked, turning everyone’s attention back on Dream.

“I got the same thing. I thought the letter was from George, it had the stamp and everything, but the wax was red instead of blue. And I open it up to find out that that depraved motherfucker has picked with the wrong person,” Dream said, now seething. His gloved hands were clenched into fists, and his tone had an edge to it. “He seems to know things that haven’t been made public information. So he either has spies...”

“Or he has Tubbo,” Tommy finished quietly. The boy’s hands were balled up as well, now, a mix of worry, and anger seemingly fighting for superiority.

Phil had his hands pressed together, resting his forehead against it as his brows furrowed. He weighed their options.

“Okay. So they’ve taken him from Diamond, and he’s sent you a letter. He wants both Gold and Emerald regions, then?” Phil asked, slightly confused. “Where does that leave Obsidian? As far as he knows, Obsidian is still its own, separate country. An isle nestled between Gold and Emerald would be a thorn in his side, sounds like more trouble than taking it all.”

“Unless he knew,” Techno mumbled, brows furrowed. “Unless he knew about the merger.”

“If I may,” Niki cut in, “We have won a war against Netherite once before, alone. Why would Schlatt try this again, on a much larger scale, no-less?”

“Maybe he’s learnt from his mistakes,” the advisor from Diamond suggested. “He had the brute force down pat, but he didn’t cover his bases. He sent his people out, leaving few to guard the castle. That’s why he has leverage this time, so that we’ll go to *him* and he won’t have to put all his eggs in three baskets.”

“Pardon me for interrupting this synergy here, but why exactly are we deciding to help you?” A gruff voice spoke for the first time that afternoon. The man with the pig mask looked up, staring the advisor down. The stranger had come into their castle, bore nothing but bad news, and was now telling them what to think, already assuming Gold and Obsidian would lend a hand. He couldn’t stand it.

“I, for one, have never met you in my life, but here you are coming in here and suggesting that I give up resources and men to help you. And for *what*?” Techno ended his question with a fist slamming on the wooden table, sending quills rattling slightly. Sapnap flinched at this, head lowered.

“*Techno*,” Dream warned, looking over at his friend, his mask hiding his confusion and betrayal.

"We *have* to save George. You *know* we do."

"Why, Dream? You love him, don't you? So why not fight your own battle here? Don't get me wrong, I care about our friendship, I really do, but I don't think you understand what you're asking of me here."

Dream raised his hands up in surrender, an attempt to calm Techno down and prevent himself from getting more heated about the already tense situation. Techno, on the other hand, had a scowl on his face, hidden under the mask he wore.

"I know it's a big ask, Techno, but we need all the help we can get. George could be *dead* in 48 hours, this is Schlatt we're talking about-"

"That's exactly my point! This is *Schlatt* you're asking me to get involved with again. And you want us to go to The Nether on some rescue mission for your boyfriend?"

Dream so badly wanted to argue, to yell and let him know how important George was, how precious he was to not only him, but Diamond as a whole. He wanted to tell him how much George had actively helped citizens through groundwork and resourcefulness. But Techno wasn't done, and he knew that doing any of that was counter-productive and that Techno's temper was already flaring up.

"Obsidian has never been involved with Diamond beyond formal dinners and events. That abhorrent continent has caused more strife than you could possibly hope to *imagine*. No matter how many wars you've won, you don't have a clue what you're dealing with across the pond. My people have gone through *plenty* at the hands of The Nether. Why should *I* agree to put them through more trauma, more bloodshed?"

The room was quiet for a moment there, nobody expecting such hostility from Technoblade. His intent was noble, he wanted what was best for his people. But with new alliances and a widening circle of those whom he considered to be family, he had more to worry about than just *his* people. Moreover, the line encapsulating 'his people' was increasingly blurry as the details of the merger were discussed.

"Techno," Phil said gently, reaching to his side to rest a hand on his shoulder. "Diamond is an important ally to Gold. If you don't wish to be involved, I can't force you, but know that I will still do everything in my power to bring George back. Every bit of resource within Gold's means, I will exhaust it all. But I promise that everything you've built up and protected on your own as a nation will not be overrun."

Techno turned his head to look at Phil, processing his statement. He saw the pained look in his eyes, the tired bags, and his expression softened as he saw the way the abduction had clearly shook the king.

This was a first for him. He never had to care about anyone but himself, Niki, and his nation. He put his all into his community, but being a part of a family meant doing things not only for one's own goals, but to help others achieve theirs. He looked over at Wilbur now, the prince had his eyes trained on the table, brows furrowed. It had been a while since he'd seen the brunette without stars in his eyes. He had almost forgotten how close Wilbur and George were. As with Tommy and Dream, he knew how important Tubbo was in this. A room full of people he cared about, and he could almost do nothing but finish the war once and for all.

"They might have Tubbo," Niki spoke quietly from next to him. He didn't have to turn to know the expression on her face, her brows knitted together, lips slightly pursed.

He closed his eyes and let out a sigh, leaning back in his seat.

“Fine, alright. I never closed that door with Schlatt, so I might as well make sure he stops being a thorn in my side in the future.”

“Thank you,” Phil said quietly, looking over at him with a soft smile.

"Nick, was it? What do you suggest?"

Sapnap, whose head was lowered out of respect for the kings before him, finally looked up again, a grateful nod towards Techno. This was the closest to an apology he'd get for being snapped at, and he would take what he could get.

And so, the group began discussing their action plan, Niki and Wilbur leaving to formulate a plan of attack separately while Techno, Dream and Phil discussed the feasibility of infiltrating the castle. Sapnap lingered in Gold for a little longer, writing down what was discussed to bring back to King and Queen Davidson. Although he was equally as harrowed, he let the rage fuel him more than the fear. His friend wasn't just *missing*, he was *taken* from him.

With the future uncertain, everyone went to bed that night with hearts heavy and buzzing with determination.

Chapter End Notes

The longest chapter yet! Things are really kicking up, please let me know what you think!!! I'm really excited and nervous about this one. From the last chapter, someone did leave a comment predicting exactly what was going on, which was cool! So if you have any theories or predictions, please let me know! I'm curious to know them all :D Kudos and feedback of any kind are greatly appreciated <3 Thanks for reading!

The Fear That Drives Courage

Chapter Summary

Dawn charged forward, bringing with it the impending bloodshed. Nobody in their right mind could feel at ease in such a situation.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream,

I'm gonna cut to the chase. Prince George was captured from Emerald this morning. Rest assured, he's in safe hands, but he will remain in safe hands until further notice.

It's simple - surrender Emerald as a state under Netherite's rule, and he'll be in your arms again. He will be sent back to Diamond, unharmed and without incident. Hell, I'll even see to it that they're sent the supplies needed for the winter. That's what you wanted, right?

Make the public, international statement denouncing your role as King and hand the nation over with the signed contract attached. If no public statement is made within 48 hours, though, your little prince will bear the brunt of it. Choose wisely.

I'll see you soon.

Schlatt,

Netherite

The air was tense. It had been a few hours of preparation at Gold, and Dream barely slept a wink. The fear had dissipated and all that was left was a fiery determination to bring his prince home. When morning came and he got dressed to embark on their journey, he knew that he had to leave no window of opportunity for the plan to fail. He simply couldn't lose George or Tubbo, so he decided that he just won't.

When dawn was about to break, he headed downstairs, dressed in his full armour. He was still tightening the strap on his gripping gloves when he arrived in the meeting room again to join the others. Niki, Wilbur and Gold's general had organized the movement of troops upon the docking of the ships, strategizing the best configuration that made use of the strengths of Emerald, Gold and Obsidian's soldiers. The first batch had departed an hour before, and was set to arrive at Netherite shores in five hours to secure a path for the next vessel. Meanwhile, another brigade of Emerald and Obsidian soldiers were waiting on the next one, ready to breach at another angle.

Leaning in, he listened to the plan once again.

"They would not expect something as straightforward again," Niki explained. "Looking at past battles, they would not know how we will approach this due to our varying combat styles. Only Obsidian has been at war with them. We will take advantage of this by having three troops attack from different angles, using different styles, at the same time."

"And once we've made use of Obsidian's battalion on the first front, Gold's archers will arrive at the eastern shores, sneaking forward as much as possible and getting as close to the main district as possible to avoid having civilians in the crossfire," Wilbur finished.

"That's where Techno and I come in?" Dream asked, a leg propped up on the chair to tighten his laces. Wilbur leaned forward, supporting his weight with a hand on the table. The other pointed to the map splayed out, shifting the pieces that symbolized the different troops.

"After the second troop enters, you two will board a ship with the third troop on the southern shores, behind the first batch. With the bulk of the soldiers distracted, you two will be able to circle the wooded area and manage the guards at the castle. You will have a smaller team with you to make this breach stealthy."

Dream nodded, internalizing this information quickly and leaning in to analyze the map.

From the other end of the table, however, Tommy spoke up.

"I want to fight."

They all turned to look at him, Wilbur with an incredulous look on his face.

"Tommy, you're 16."

"*Tubbo's* in that castle, Will. I know my way with a sword, you've seen me"

"We don't know that for sure," Dream clarified. "He's missing, but for all we know, something else could have happened."

"If there's even a chance he's in there, I want to take it. I've been training, Will, honest," Tommy argued, though in place of his usual fire and gusto was a pleading, scared boy.

Wilbur circled the table, kneeling down by his little brother. Tommy looked back, desperate and uncertain.

"It's not safe. Look, I know how anxious you are knowing that *Tubbo's* missing, I understand that. I care a great deal for George as well, but putting ourselves in harm's way will do us no good."

Tommy stayed quiet, knowing he was right but stubbornly trying to formulate a counter-argument. Dream, who was done with his boots, stepped closer and rested a hand on his shoulder.

"If he's there, we *will* bring him back," Dream promised. "I swear on my life, I will bring him back. No matter what happens, no matter how the war turns out, he'll be back home."

Tom looked up at the masked man, blinking back the tears in his eyes. His grip on the edge of his seat was tight, leaving his knuckles white. Upon deciding that Dream was being sincere in doing everything within his power to bring his friend back, he gave a nod.

"Okay. God... okay." He let out a deep exhale, closing his eyes.

Wilbur stood up and hugged him, cradling his head as the younger boy calmed himself down. He let out a quiet sigh, looking over at Dream with sad eyes. It was clear that seeing his brother dealing with such a stressful situation made his heart heavy.

“You should go find Techno and get prepared. Niki, could you get Phil in here as well, if you see him?”

Dream nodded, giving Wilbur a gentle pat on the back and giving a nod of goodbye to Niki when they left the room in different directions.

The king made his way to the living quarters to see if Techno was already downstairs. Instead, by the fire, the advisor from Diamond was standing by the window, looking out into the dark meadows, with stray lanterns lit along the outskirts of the castle’s boundaries. He seemed to have heard Dream’s footsteps, from the way he glanced over his shoulder and looked back out the front. He had returned back to his castle late in the afternoon the day before, and it appears he didn’t stay long if he was back here again.

“King Dream,” he acknowledged, voice neutral and unreadable. “Technoblade’s in his quarters getting ready.”

“Thank you,” he spoke, pulling up a chair to sit next to him. He grabbed one of the bread buns from the table and began to eat, knowing he’d need the energy. “You’re Sapnap, right?”

Sapnap seemed to hesitate at this, surprised. He tilted his head in thought but didn’t turn to look at the masked king.

“Yeah. Only George has ever called me that, though.”

“I’m sorry, I’ll go back to using Sir Nick if you’d prefer-”

“No, it’s alright,” he assured. “It’s just, I didn’t think he’d have told you about that.”

Dream turned his attention away from the foggy field and looked to Sapnap thoughtfully.

“He only mentioned the last time he visited. He speaks highly of you. Says you’re the best friend a person could have. I envy that, honestly.”

Sapnap let out a soft laugh, looking down at his hands which held the envelope. The sides were crinkled by now, from how hard he had held it when his anger at the situation grew more difficult to bear.

“Thank you. He, uh, spoke a lot about you too.”

Dream let out a soft laugh, easing the mildly awkward air between the two.

“I doubt they’re good things,” he joked, drawing a small smile from the advisor.

“Well, not until the last time he came by,” he admitted. “But he’s always kinda liked you, I think. He complains a lot, yeah, but he’s a thinker more than he is a feeler.”

Dream felt his tense heart swell slightly at the mention. A strange feeling, as it heightened his drive to bring George back unharmed, but at the same time made him feel at ease. Knowing that the feeling of attraction was mutual, even if it was only realised for a few days.

“What did he say?”

Sapnap bit his lip gently, considering whether or not he should say it. He glanced over again, seeing Dream looking back at him, and decided it would do more good than harm.

“He likes your eyes,” he said quietly, causing the king to look away. The mask covered his cheeks, but Sapnap noticed the way his skin had a tinge of pink to it as a result. “He likes the way you’re good to him. How you treat him like a gentleman, yet respect him all the same.”

Dream let out a little laugh, tilting his head down to hide the deepening blush on his face. Sapnap couldn’t help but laugh as well, amused by this reaction.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I know it probably doesn’t mean much, but... Thank you. For taking care of him and stuff, I think he’s gonna be in safe hands with you.”

Dream bit his lip gently in consideration.

“It does mean a lot. I really do care about him, more than anyone or anything else.”

Sapnap reached out and grabbed his arm gently, making Dream look up and meet his gaze. His mellow expression had faded for one a little more serious, and his tone following in suit.

“Then bring him back.”

Through it all, the anxieties and fear in that statement didn’t go unnoticed by the king. He carefully pulled his hand from his arm, leaning in to give the advisor a hug, which surprised them both. Instinctively, Sapnap’s arms rested on Dream’s back, allowing the taller man to offer his support and assurance.

“I promise. I’m going to bring George back if it kills me.”

They pulled away slowly after a minute, Sapnap sliding a hand up to give Dream’s shoulder a gentle squeeze before pulling away.

“I’ll hold you to that.”

A heavy set of footsteps coming around the corner interrupted their thoughts and they looked over, finding Technoblade tightening the metal guard on his forearm. The hog mask covered his eyes and nose, but the lower half of his face was enough to give away his serious expression.

“Dream, Sir Nick. Good morning. You sharpen your sword yet, Dream?”

Dream gave a final glance at Sapnap, who gave a small bow to the king that just entered, and made his way over to his friend. They greeted one another with the clinking of their metal arm pieces.

“Yeah, all of last night. Ready to head to the docks?” Dream asked, to which Techno nodded.

“Let me grab my axe.”

"Wake up, pretty boy."

George let out a quiet groan, a quiet thumping of his head pulling him back to consciousness. The first thing he noticed was this was *definitely* not his bed. His cheek was pressed against hard concrete, slightly damp and uncomfortably dirty.

The second thing he noticed was that he couldn't move his arms. They were bound behind his back with what he could only assume to be rope, tight and frustratingly sturdy. He tried to sit up, but the strain caused his throbbing head to hurt more and there he was falling back on his side.

When he peeked his eyes open, it took a second for it to adjust. Wherever he was, it was dark and the silhouette of a man loomed over him behind a set of metal bars. Light from a door was seeping into the room, leaving his face nothing but a shadow. Squinting, he could make out a dark suit, but no distinguishable features. His vision was still blurry.

"Good morning," the man spoke, before it was interrupted by the screeching of the metal gate opening. The accent was most definitely not one he'd heard before.

The quiet footsteps approached the bound boy. The unknown stranger squatted by George, head tilted slightly in curiosity. George could now just barely make out the features on his face. Neat lines extended from under his eyes, down to his cheekbones in dark, precise lines. They looked like scars, jarring to the boy who had lived in the Overworld all his life. The prince had never seen the marks of a Netharian before, but there they were, albeit a bit unfocused.

"Who are you?" George croaked out, his voice scratchy and uncomfortable. His gaze met the man before him and deep red eyes bore into his own.

"Right, we've never met. My name is Alex, lovely to meet you, your highness," the man spoke, keeping a monotonous tone. He carefully grabbed George's face, turning it by the jaw to examine his features. Apart from the dirt, it was clean and showed no signs of injury in the capture. "Glad to know they didn't aim for the face when they knocked you out, would've been a shame to ruin such a pretty face. I see why Dream took an interest in you."

"Alex... Blackstone?" George managed to mumble, trying to turn his head away, but the grip didn't let up. As Dream was brought up, he could more or less assume that Emerald was one of the nations he was being offered for trade. He should have known that having such close ties with Dream would come with risks.

"That's right," Alex praised, pausing to look at his features a bit more before letting go and standing back up again. "At least I know they didn't hit you too hard, then."

"Where am I?" George demanded.

Alex clicked his tongue in disapproval, nudging George so that he laid on his back. He looked down at the man once more, taking in his dishevelled appearance and smiling slightly at the visible discomfort on his face.

"So many questions. Unfortunately, as much as I'd love to stay and answer all of them, I have other matters to attend to. But I'll give you a brief rundown. You're in Netherite's castle as our bargaining chip, which is worth Emerald, Obsidian and Gold, from what we've calculated. You've been out for a good couple of hours now, and your friends are probably going to be here in a couple more."

George's vision was starting to clear up now, along with the ache in his head which he now knew was a result of being struck. He could feel it at the back of his head, now. Memories of waking up

in the middle of the night to hands grabbing him and muffling his yells of protests flashed in vague snapshots in his mind, but from how abruptly his memory ended, he could assume what happened next.

The crownless prince looked up at the king before him, attempting to maintain a stoic expression despite the feeling of thick ropes and his hands at an awkward position digging into his lower back.

“He’s coming. He's gonna come and get me out of here,” George gritted through his teeth, keeping an even tone.

Alex laughed at that.

“Oh, I’m counting on it. That’s why you’re here, sweetheart, but he’s not gonna make it out alive.”

Growing a sudden burst of confidence, George spat at him, but it fell just short of Alex’s shoes. The Netherian king’s smile grew and he let out a condescending laugh.

“Ooh, you’ve got a bit of fight in you. That’s always fun.” Alex pressed his foot against the prince’s stomach, adding pressure on his wrists and back and making the man grimace and let out a pained cough.

“*Fuck you,*” George managed out, his voice broken and pained.

"Well, on that note, I've got places to be." Alex removed the weight and walked out of the cell, carefully locking the gate behind him. He hooked the set of keys onto his belt. "We'll speak again soon. I'll be sure of it."

The arrogant man walked out and closed the heavy door behind him, leaving George alone and immersed in darkness once again.

The sun hovered an inch over the horizon, gleaming into the front of the ship. The gentle swaying of the ship to the ocean's currents was almost soothing, and it would have been if this were any other scenario. However, it juxtaposed with the tense uncertainty that emanated from each and every passenger on board. While the third troop and their specialized team of five were scattered across the boat, Dream sat on the wooden railing dangling at the bow of the ship, staring out into the empty, open waters. He was anything but at ease.

In the past two hours on board, he had used the time to sink into his thoughts, allowing his anger to simmer for a bit. He knew it would be useful to keep it active to drive him throughout the mission. He replayed the moments he'd spent with George, from the first time they'd met on the balcony, to the creek, to his most recent Emerald visit. Their relationship began at a rocky start, but it had grown to something vulnerable and genuine. Knowing this, and knowing the fact that he was taken so unjustly and reduced to being a mere trading piece, the feeling he felt was indescribable, but not completely foreign.

He recalled the last boy he'd loved, and how cruel his father had been in removing his key source of happiness. That night, with dried blood on his face and his heart on the floor in a million pieces, he laid in bed seething, determined to make a good king out of spite. He would be better than his father in every way, and he never shied away from conflict. He wasn't a coward.

When Techno climbed up on the railing next to him, he barely glanced over. The pink-haired man was rubbing the blade of his axe, a leg propped up to support the weight of it. Dream's sword was sheathed in its holder, hanging from a nearby pillar, but it had already been sharpened and polished before.

"Busy?" The deep hog asked, earning a quiet hum from him.

"Thinking," Dream responded, taking a deep breath.

"Anxious?"

"Eager."

"Ooh, that's an interesting one. Don't know if most people would understand that, but I do," Techno said, looking over at the other masked man with a small grin. Dream seemed to consider this for a bit, almost surprised that the man who didn't even want to get involved could understand his response.

"Because we're different. You and I, we're fighters."

"So is everyone else on this ship," Techno mused out. "Yet, I doubt 'Eager' is the word they'd use."

Dream's grip tightened on the wooden barrier he was using as a seat, his jaw tensing for a moment before he rephrased his response.

"*Fine*. I'm pissed. I'm pissed, and I'm eager to get my hands on Schlatt to give him exactly what he deserves."

Techno was taken aback by this, but appreciated the drive nonetheless. This was a side of Dream he had only ever heard about, never seen. Dream was usually calm, collected. And while he kept an even tone, it wasn't hard to tell that his emotions were simmering closer to a boil. Internally, he acknowledged this to be useful to them.

"And what are you gonna do when you find him, Dream?"

The masked man grinned, an expression of hate and budding bloodlust for a rightful cause. It almost mimicked the smile on the piece of bone, almost unnerving and unreadable. Techno raised a brow, all the more curious to hear his response.

"I'm gonna slit his fucking throat."

The rest of the journey through the ocean went on as quiet as expected. They had eaten another meal together, fully aware of the possibility of it being their last. As the shores came into view, the battle being only half an hour away, Dream gathered everyone in the common area, standing on the banister leaning off the captain's deck. The soldiers looked up at him, tentatively waiting to hear his words of hope and determination. Techno leaned against the stairs, axe hooked to his belt, and listened in. He was also curious as to what his friend had to say going into battle. Seeing the pale white mask look down on an army of well-armed soldiers was truly a sight to behold. After a few moments of soaking in the strange D-Day atmosphere, Dream finally spoke, his voice clear and strangely calm.

"Well, we're here." The thick air was suffocating, with the anxieties of each and every soldier filling the room, making it almost hard to breathe.

“Are you all scared? Anxious?” Nobody responded, but the answer was obvious. Dream’s lips fell into a thin line.

“Good. You should be. That fear, that uncertainty of whether or not we’re going to make it through to see tomorrow? That’s good, that’s what’s gonna make us fight. Not for ourselves, not for Prince George, but for our nations and our loved ones. If we don’t win this, we lose everything. Our rights, our livelihoods. As uncertain as today may seem, a future under Netherite’s rule is sure to be far more turbulent. They will ruin everything we’ve built, our own respective countries crumbling in their hands.”

Dream leapt off the banister and onto the deck below, being eye-level with everyone else. With a dangerous grin, he unsheathed his sword and raised it high over his head.

“Fuck if we’re gonna let them!”

The other soldiers raised their fists in solidarity, letting out yells of agreement, the fear still ever-present in them, but the determination and conviction in their cause converting these worries into the desire and *need* to make it out of it alive. Techno couldn’t help but smile, raising his axe and joining the others in their cheers.

Chapter End Notes

Early chapter because escapism ahahaaaa

I hope you enjoy

Who We Need To Be (When The Time Comes)

Chapter Summary

Upon breaching the castle, Dream and Techno work to fulfil their objectives.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream and Techno weaved between the trees with silent footsteps, the distant sounds of battle cries and the clashing of blades were quiet, but served as a heavy reminder of the gravity of the situation they found themselves in. Kilometers deep in enemy territory, with a team of five in their stride. Dream didn't have the time nor capacity to process this, zeroed in on the task at hand. He was hyper-aware of the quiet rustling of the leaves, every snapping twig. Occasionally, the stray soldier wandering the woods would need to be dealt with, but for the most part, the troops were occupying the more western territories. And with word of the second landing spot on the eastern shores, Netherite was occupied trying to funnel their troops to cover both fronts.

"Techno, how far?" Dream mumbled, keeping his voice low.

"Bout ten more minutes at this pace. Castle walls are up ahead."

Upon breaching the clearing where the castle stood, they ducked into cover and took a peek at the tall, dark red walls of the watchtower. The two archers from Gold climbed up the tree for a better angle, keeping hidden from sight with their bows drawn.

"Eyes?" Dream asked them.

"Two guards on the southern watchtower, one along the walkway," one of them whispered. "We could take them out quiet and easy."

"No, hold your fire. We don't know if the other watchtowers can see them. We might give ourselves away."

"The breach in the wall's been patched up," Techno said, pointing at a gap in the architecture, climbing up the tower. "There's a blind spot there, in the ridge along where the curve of the watchtower meets the walls."

"If that's the case, it should be the same for all four watchtowers," one of the swordsmen suggested.

"I say we split up and climb these ridges. On cue, we do a quiet takeout. Pick them off all at once," another mumbled.

"Feasible. The less commotion, the better," Dream agreed. He looked up at one of the archers, the best around, perched in the trees. "Lilla, how's your bird's impression?"

Lilla covered a hand over her mouth, letting out a bird call that was believable and reverberated through the woods. Glancing up at the guards, they seemed to have barely blinked an eye. Lilla looked down and nodded, tying her blonde hair into a tight ponytail in preparation.

"Perfect. Stay here and give the cue when it seems like the right time. Everyone else, in pairs, scale the other three towers. Stay hidden until you hear her."

"This tower's mine, then?" Lilla asked with a grin, leaning down from the branch.

"If you think you can take all three from here, then yeah, go nuts," Techno responded, tightening his braid and standing from where he was kneeling. "I call the Western tower."

They dispersed and within a short while, Dream was between two walls, armoured back pressed against a narrow column and feet pressed to the curved brick wall of the Northern tower. Above, he could hear the talking and movement of Netherite guards. A dull conversation, really, apart from a brief mention of the western shores close to being reclaimed, making his stomach drop a little. That meant that the second troop was struggling.

Saving himself from overthinking, a familiar bird call brought himself back to reality. He hooked his hands over the ledge and pulled himself up over the walls. From the other side of the tower, one of Obsidian's swordsmen emerged as well, giving a nod in his direction while plunging his sword in one of the guards present.

Dream grabbed the other in a chokehold and pressed a hand over his nose and mouth, keeping him from making a noise. He slipped down behind the ledge, keeping them out of sight in case there were any guards along the walls. Once the two at the tower were out, he peeked over the walls. Upon seeing that there were none left standing, he stood up, brushing off the dust from his armour. From the western tower, he heard a long whistle from the Western tower and they made their way over to Techno and the other archer he had with him. Lilla was the last to join the pack, but she did so while wiping off an arrow she'd retrieved from the body of a Netherian. When all were accounted for, Dream spoke up again, looking at the other masked man.

"Point of entry?"

"The doors over there are usually guarded on the inside," Techno said, leaning over the inner wall and pointing at one of the entrances of the castle. "Some soldiers are guarding the archway by the Northern wing, but they shouldn't be able to see us if we head down the stairs and follow along the wall. Some of 'em patrol the perimeter, but we'll be fine picking them off when they're not out in the open until we reach the front doors."

"We can deal with the guards if you two can make it in the other entrance, then," Lilla suggested. "Unless you'd like us to enter with you, we could keep more from coming in."

"Techno and I can manage around a few guards on the inside. Besides, it's indoors, I don't think a full team of seven would be able to sneak around unnoticed," Dream agreed.

"Then focus on getting in, we've got you covered," the Obsidian swordsman said, lowering the front of his helmet. The team made their way down the stairs, weapons drawn in preparation.

Dream and Techno walked through the hallways, their weapons stained with blood. It was eerily quiet in the castle, with statues at every turn, each made of metal or stone, taking on the likeness of past Netherite rulers. Techno was visibly on guard, eyes trained forward with his back hunched slightly, and Dream had his sword drawn, ready to meet a patrolling officer at every corner.

Yet, none came. It seemed to be almost deserted, and the hairs on the back of Dream's neck were standing.

"Was it like this last year?" The Emerald king asked, keeping his voice low and his footsteps light.

"Almost. It was quiet then too. There was more resistance when entering, though."

"You think that could be attributed to a better gameplan or having larger numbers?"

Techno let out an ambiguous hum, making Dream glanced over at him for clarification. He got none in response. They tiptoed through for a while longer, making a few more turns.

"Something's off. This doesn't feel right," the blonde mumbled, looking over his shoulder to ensure they weren't being followed. "It's too quiet."

"Oh it's most definitely a trap," Techno agreed. "Nobody's stupid enough not to learn from their own mistakes, especially not Schlatt. But we're in too deep now, so we'll work around whatever he-"

Before Techno could finish his sentence, the sound of a tripping wire interrupted him and not a second later, the metal statue at the end of that hallway, looking no different from the others they had passed before, pointed its metal staff towards the two. From the hollow barrel that stared them down, a series of arrows shot through the middle of the hallway in quick succession, towards the two kings.

Luckily, they both reacted quickly to the shifting statue and moved out of the way. Unluckily, Dream was a second slower in avoiding the line of attack than he should have been. The arrow whizzed between them, cutting through an inch or two of exposed flesh on his arm, just under the covered shoulder of his metal chest plate. He hissed, bringing a hand up to the wound as blood began to seep through his tunic and chainmail. He dropped his sword in surprise.

"Fuck."

Techno was quick to pull a long strip of cloth from his pocket, pulling Dream to the side in a less exposed position. As the masked Emerald used the wall for support, he wrapped the cloth over the wound, keeping a good amount of pressure to stop the bleeding and tying the excess into a quick knot.

"How bad is it?" Techno asked, marking the first time Dream had ever heard traces of genuine concern in his friend's voice.

"Manageable. Hurts a little, but I'll be fine," Dream gritted through his teeth, jaw tense.

"That should stop the bleeding soon, but you should go easy on that. This might be the best time for you to find your way into the dungeons to get George and Tubbo, that's probably where they are."

"And where are you headed?" Dream asked, pushing off from the wall and stretching his arm slightly to test his mobility.

"The throne room. I have a job to finish that's a year overdue."

Dream's expression beneath his mask hardened and he gripped Techno's forearm for a moment, making him look up.

"Wasn't he my kill?"

Techno hesitated, the tension in the air spiking for a moment.

"He's taken more from me than he has from you."

"You *had* your chance last time and you pussied out. It's *my* turn," Dream hissed, glaring as his anger tipped over merely simmering.

Techno pulled his arm away firmly, but not aggressively, and their gazes, though filtered, remained locked on one another.

"Dream."

After a beat, Dream felt his temper subside, and he brought his hand up to his friend's shoulder, the other lifting his mask from his eyes for a moment.

"Sorry. Fuck. Just... don't kill him until I'm there. Please."

They stared at each other in silence, both seeking some kind of compromise. Techno, despite the tension still in the process of dissipating, gave a nod.

"Fine, okay. I won't. Stay safe, and watch your step next time," the gruff voice spoke as they walked over the triggered tripwire, reaching a junction. He pats the metal shoulder of Dream's good arm before pulling away again. Leaning down, he picked Dream's sword off the ground and handed it to the man, whose mask was back securely on his face.

"You too."

Techno finally made it. Facing the entrance of the throne room, he was brought back to the same place he found himself in just a year ago. There was a shadow of doubt at the back of his head - not because he wasn't sure of his abilities, but because he knew things would be different this time. He was a different man then, with different responsibilities and duties to fulfil. The weight on his shoulders, while lighter now, carried weight of a different kind.

A year ago, he stood for a nation, but he stood alone. His reasons were just as selfish as they were selfless - his desire for independence and prosperity for his people were not purely for those who stood behind him, but for his own spiteful, vengeful ideas. He wanted to prove that he could do it to those who, bound by blood and heritage, still refused to love him. He wanted to matter for once. However, with the thousands of citizens he had enriched in the process, was it such a bad thing? If you aided in the midst of a crisis, carried a child from a burning building just to be appraised as a hero, are your deeds tainted by ill intent?

With that question still unanswered, he pushed through the heavy wooden doors.

No guards greeted him, no words drawn at his entrance. All he saw was Schlatt, sitting on his throne, once again. His quiet footsteps cut through the silence like a hot knife. This was all too familiar, something was definitely wrong.

"Techno," the bearded man finally greeted, welcoming him like an old friend, his arms

outstretched.

"So glad you could make it," Schlatt welcomed with a grin.

As Techno passed the tall, towering pillars leading up to the throne, his eyes were trained on the scheming man in front of him. As he approached the man with his axe drawn, he didn't feel like responding.

"I'd stop walking if I were you," Schlatt said. When Techno didn't listen, he clicked his tongue in faux disappointment, glancing over to look at a nearby pillar. At the snap of his fingers, the sound of an unsheathing dagger brought Techno's attention to his left.

A familiar servant boy was sitting behind the column, rope binding his arms behind his back and his ankles together, with a man he had never personally met squatting behind him, a knife to his throat. Techno halted in his tracks, his axe up. The boy let out quiet whimpers, pleading eyes looking up at him. He reminded him of Tommy for a moment.

"There you go, big guy," Schlatt praised, revelling in Techno's shock, but the brute's attention was trained on the man with the hostage.

"King Alexis Quinn? Well, I'll be damned," Techno mused, eyeing the man holding the boy hostage. The cogs turning in his head finally clicked into place as he realised why Emerald was brought into this as well.

"Drop the axe," Alex said calmly, shifting the knife in his hands to hold his thumb on the end of the handle, the pointed tip of the blade pressing carefully to Tubbo's skin. "I'm not playing games."

"Alright, easy on the kid. You've got me," Techno said, slowly lowering his axe to the ground and raising his hands in surrender.

"Atta boy," the King of Blackstone spoke with a smirk. "You see those chains up by that pillar behind you? Why don't you go ahead and cuff yourself for me so I can let the servant boy go?"

Techno backed up to where he was instructed, but slowly, trying to draw this out. Hopefully, Dream wouldn't take too long. More than that, he knew that once he was in chains, there was no escape for him. He had no lockpicks, ways to get out. He would be at the mercy of Schlatt and Alex, all to save some kid.

"You can't expect me to put these on myself, can you?" Techno reasoned, keeping an even tone to hide his thoughts.

When he didn't move, a pained noise sounded from the young brunette, who squirmed slightly as the knife dug a little deeper, piercing a thin layer of skin. Alarm bells raised in Techno's head and he snarled in outrage. Alex leaned into Tubbo's ear, whispering something that made him stop squirming, and he settled down to a quieter whimper once again.

"Cuffs. *Now.*"

"*Fine*, okay. Just leave him be, he doesn't need to be involved in all this."

Techno instantly obliged, stepping back until his back hit the wide, marble pillar. Reaching up, he wrapped the steel cuffs around his wrists.

"I didn't hear a click. What, do you think I'm stupid or something?" Alex warned again, eyes

narrowing. Techno let out a quiet sigh and tightened the cuffs until it clicked shut, sealing his fate.

He understood now. Feeling the cool metal against his skin and the marble wall against his back, he knew that he had learnt love. He had learnt that reciprocity and unconditional were words that could coexist. He learnt that love, in its purest, familial form, meant giving all that you can give just to ease the burden on another's shoulders. And the feeling of performing a selfless act, just to make a loved one smile again someday, would be more than enough to feed him the strength to brave through anything. Now, rendered helpless at the hands of his enemy, he wasn't as afraid as he thought he'd be.

"Alright, Alex, you can put the kid down now," Schlatt spoke, turning Techno's attention back to him.

Schlatt had a wooden red bat in his hand now, and he was carefully ascending the steps, approaching the masked man.

"Glad to see you again, old friend."

Techno scoffed.

"Wish I could say the same for you."

This drew a laugh from the other Netharian, who carefully took the hog mask off his red. He hummed, examining the features he so desperately tried to keep hidden. Techno didn't dare look at Tubbo, whom he could feel watching on in shock. His armour was slid off of him, leaving him defenceless. He had no secrets left.

"Still a runt with the mask or without," Schlatt jokes, making Alex chuckle. The Blackstone King was now sat on the arm of the throne, wiping his blade clean with a cloth, Techno glared at Schlatt regardless, remaining stoic despite his situation.

"You gonna tell me what you want yet?" Techno asked as Schlatt fastened the shackles around his ankles as well, rendering him immobile.

"I'll wait 'till your buddy gets here. Until then, you and I are gonna have a bit of fun," Schlatt said with a menacing grin, the wooden bat drawn over his shoulder, preparing for a swing.

After a few minutes of navigating down a few sets of winding staircases, Dream found what he was looking for. The musty scent of the lower section of the castle hit him almost instantly. With his sword still drawn, Dream tried to navigate through the narrow paths. The cracks in the cobblestone ground were moist with dirt and grime, while the winding walls were dimly lit. The purposefully confusing hallways turned in strange corners. The cells were empty and decrepit, barely used or maintained.

It wasn't until Dream finally found a section lined with large metal doors were the paths sufficiently lit. There were around twenty, all identical. The king opened a few slowly, taking in the small, empty rooms with no sign of his prince or friend anywhere. As he checked a few, he found

As he was about to pass another door, he heard a noise; A quiet rustling of clothes that found its

way around the steel barrier. Pausing in his step, Dream turned to face it, grabbing the handle and pushing down.

Both to his relief and concern, he saw a figure leaning against the metal bars, arms resting out through them. As he pushed the door open further and let the light in, the frayed ropes were seen in bunches over in the corner of the cell. On the floor in reach of the cell was a metal nail, misshapen and rusty. The man in question had his eyes clenched shut as he was unable to adjust to the light. Dream's eyes, on the other hand, were wide open.

"George," he breathed out, taking his mask off and sliding to his knees by the gate.

His hand reached between the metal bars, immediately cupping George's cheeks and examining his tired, slightly sunken face. Hearing Dream's voice, though, his eyes opened again and he gazed up at the scarred face of his saviour. At the realisation that it was really him, his hand rose to the one cupping his cheek, leaning into the comfort of the touch.

"You came," he mumbled, tears filling his eyes. "God, I knew you'd come. Thank you, thank you."

A soft whimper escaped his lips when Dream pulled away, but the blonde shushed him gently, reaching for the nail laying on the ground and picking the lock of the gate urgently. Within seconds, the gate was open and George was embraced tightly, the familiar warmth keeping the prince grounded.

"Of course, of course I'd come. I had to," Dream consoled, carefully rubbing his hand along the prince's back while one was nestled in brunette hair, cradling his head to his neck. "I'm here now. I'm here now, I've got you."

They stayed like that for a few more moments, relishing in their reunion. George was trembling at the uncertainty of it all, but the presence alone was enough to keep him tethered back from his thoughts. Dream took his hands, examining the dried blood on the fingertips and carefully rubbing his thumb along the reddened marks wrapping around his wrists, tainting the perfect skin that once was. While Dream had tried so hard to keep his fingers from being pricked in the past, the flower he didn't expect, thorny and fuelled with greed and ruthlessness, had finally come around to hurt his prince and he had no say in it.

"I'm sorry I couldn't stop this," he whispered, leaning George's head up to press their foreheads together gently. His eyes closed for a moment.

"You couldn't have," George's weak voice managed, and a slender, cold hand rose to Dream's cheek. "This was out of your control."

"I could have done *something*. God if I'd just *known*..."

"Dream, there was no way for you to know."

"I'm sorry I let them hurt you-"

His words were caught in his throat when he felt a pair of soft lips meet his own, reducing anything he had to say. The thoughts behind his eyes drifted and for that very moment, he could almost forget the situation that brought them there. The cold, dark cellar had drifted out of their perception, leaving in its place a void where they could simply exist, intertwined together, in each other's arms, lips pressed together and bodies jointly in one being. There was no need to process what had happened because although it came suddenly, somewhere within them, they both saw the

potential for their feelings to develop at such an exponential rate, blossoming. They both knew to an extent that this is where their meetings would eventually lead up to. Whether or not they both would admit it was another story.

The silent promises for the future.

They finally pulled away, both eyes fluttering open, brown meeting green in a mosaic of hazel tiles, singing songs of trust and hope and love. Soft smiles caressed their faces and their surroundings materialised once again. Dream's thrumming anger from just minutes ago had subsided, and the boiling rage was brought back down to a simmer, controlled fire keeping it from going cold.

"We'll talk about this later," George assured, taking Dream's hand and bringing it to his chest as a promise. "For now, we should get out of here. Did you come alone?"

Dream shook his head, helping him stand with shaky legs.

"I came with Techno."

"Ah, right. Alex did mention the involvement of Gold and Obsidian," George nodded, shaking off his hazy state of mind.

Dream paused.

"Alex? Alexis, Blackstone?"

George looked up, his expression softening.

"You don't know."

"How is Alex involved in this?"

"He's working with Netherite in all this. The Nether wants to expand."

Dream's gaze hardened and his jaw clenched slightly.

"If that's the case, Techno needs my help. And if Tubbo isn't here, he damn well better be up there with them."

"Tubbo's here too?" George asked, brows furrowed in concern. "When? What?"

"I... don't know, but I can only guess he came a little earlier than you. Somewhere between 2 to 5 days."

George frowned. As his hand drifted up Dream's arm to reach his shoulder, he felt the stray, loose fabric of the makeshift bandage hanging from where it was tied tightly. He gazed down at it, seeing it tied a tad too tightly and stained red with drying blood.

"Wait, Dream, you're hurt."

Dream offered a small smile, bringing his mask back down over his eyes as he prepared to take George out of the dungeons.

"It's fine, I promise," he assured gently. "Doesn't hurt that bad."

Despite this, George began untying the knot.

“Let me help, at least.”

There were no protests as George began to re-wrap the wound, winding the cloth around a few times with appropriate pressure. It still stung, but it was far more comfortable now, the cloth not digging into his skin on just one thin point. With a handful left at the ends, the prince secured the knot and tucked the excess in. Dream flexed his arm, grimacing faintly, but the mobility he had with this was worth it.

“There,” George said gently, planting a ginger kiss over it for good luck.

“Thank you, doll,” Dream said, offering a small smile. “Let’s get us out of here, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

*To you, I sing my praises and my pleads,
I beg, please show me where this path might lead.
Through quarries, scaling up to mountain caps,
Where breeze may find my skin and tear my maps?
Or into fire, where my arms will fold
To shield you from the licking flames? I hold
Inches of sea glass, molten by the rage
In hopes that we may survive past today.*

I am afraid.

*But I promise you if you'll promise me
When the time comes, we'll be who we need to be.*

Chapter End Notes

Three more chapters left after this! Thank you so much for your support thus far. It genuinely means so much to me that people care about this story. Kudos and comments appreciated!

Also weew, new poem, enjoy!

Hell Is Empty And All The Devils Are Here

Chapter Summary

The clatter of metal, the agonizing screams, the silent finish. The final battle that ends the war once and for all.

Hell is empty and all the devils are here - William Shakespear.

Chapter Notes

Reminder to read the tags, especially if you have any triggers!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo was scared.

Scratch that, he was terrified. The past ten minutes had felt like a decade, and he sure as hell felt as though he'd aged as much. It was a blur, really. The swinging of a bat, the man with rams making demands with a calm demeanour that nobody should trust, least of all him. The gory sight was filtered through his tears, but it didn't make it any less bearable when he could hear the cries of the man once thought to be invincible. Reduced to a bloodied, half-conscious mess just to save his life. He felt so immensely guilty.

If he had just taken a safer path home, if he had been more careful.

It had gone beyond knowing he'd seen something he shouldn't have. It was holding a baby bird in his hands knowing his scent would make it ostracized from its family. It was seeing a crack in the hull of a ship and letting it take voyage anyway. It was watching a man beaten to a pulp and knowing he was the cause. As valuable as life was, he knew it wasn't worth whatever he had seen Technoblade go through. Stifling his sobs, he let his head hang, not wanting to watch further. But moments after he did so, the harsh grip on his jaw pulled his head back up, forcing him to face the scene before him.

"Watch," the cold voice of the King of Blackstone spoke from behind him, and the sobs were coming again.

Schlatt had the bat on the floor now. Techno, body bruised from the blunt object striking him repeatedly, was chained to the pillar. Blood dripped down his nose and head, staining his tunic a horrible brownish-red colour. He was heaving, breaths heavy and uneven, yet he kept his eyes trained on the monster before him. The last thing he wanted to do was give Schlatt the satisfaction of giving in - to lower his gaze and just accept his fate.

"You know, I was generous," Schlatt began, wiping the blood from his shirt and brushing it off on a clean spot he could find on Techno's tunic. "I offered you supplies, support. All you could ever want."

Techno coughed up a bit of blood, landing on the marble ground at Schlatt's feet. The king stared at it for a moment, a satisfied smirk on his face.

"Hell, you would've kept your title and that crown on your pretty head. You wouldn't even have to do all the work that comes with it, just reap the benefits. All you had to do was sign a piece of paper. It was that easy. I was so *gracious*. And how did you repay me?"

Techno let out a low growl as Schlatt looked at him expectantly.

"I gave you what you dese-"

"You held a blade to my throat and told me to get fucked," Schlatt cut off, grabbing the bat and pressing the blunt end hard against Techno's stomach, where a dark bruise was already forming under the fabric.

Techno let out a pained noise, tensing up at the fire that shot through his veins in an instant. He let out another cough, droplets of blood making a mess of the jacket of Schlatt's suit and the bat he was using, the red barely noticeable. It was red, anyway.

"You were stubborn," Schlatt continued, "You wanted it all. You bit off more than you could chew, without momma bird helping you out. Why don't you look where that led you, hm? Having everything you fought so hard to maintain crumbling before you, all because you didn't want my help."

The pressure lightened up as Schlatt thankfully dropped the bat, allowing the brute to recover for a moment.

"But it's okay, momma bird's right here and I'm gonna make sure you don't ever have to go through something like that again. You don't need to manage a big, complicated region. I'll take that burden off your shoulders for you, don't you worry."

The smile on the man's face was terrifying. It wasn't bloodthirsty, driven by any form of revenge or motive. It was carefree, collected, and paired with the blood staining his blazer, the ruthlessness was unmistakable.

With Dream, Techno knew that there was a reason for his violence. While vengeance, as far as he knew, was a morally grey area to most people, it was a response to grief and loss. His friend craved blood to be spilt not because he liked the feeling, but because it was what he thought would make things right. But staring at the man before him, horns curved out and a lazy expression on his face, Techno knew that there was no semblance of justice, no prospect of redemption.

Schlatt was a lost cause, consumed by the monster he had created with his pursuits, embodying the greed he had been feeding for years. It started with crumbs, alliances with other countries of the Nether. And as its stomach grew, he began with bigger appetizers, having them pledge their loyalty to Netherite. When the Nether still wasn't enough, making deals with Overworld nations and setting bases across the ocean gave the greed a taste of what control could feel like. He was the shell of a man, and although the Netharian-shade of red in his eyes burned, they were burning at the expense of everything and everyone around him, leaving mountains of ash and smoke in its path until there was nothing left. He would stop at nothing. He was hungry, but it was a kind of hunger that was insatiable. There was no reasoning with him at this point, nor any point in the future.

Schlatt was walking back towards him now, having retrieved something from the throne. With a quill in one hand and papers in the other, he began to read.

"I, Technoblade of Obsidian, hereby relinquish my position as Ruler of this great country and renounce Obsidian's status as an independent nation. I offer the land and assets to Netherite, and stake no claim over any of what I once had."

"You're ridiculous. I'll never sign that," Techno said, voice cracking at the weight of his own chest.

"That's fine, little runt. I understand. I'll just do it for you, make it easier."

Schlatt forced the quill in his hand, a bruising grip over his fingers to make them wrap around it. Still, Techno resisted, squirming so much that the quill eventually fell out of his hand. With his carefree expression now darkened, Schlatt gripped Techno's hand tighter, glaring into his eyes and leaning closer.

"Last chance. Don't make me do something you'll regret," he snarled lowly. But taking advantage of the proximity, Techno simply spat on his face.

Schlatt paused, blinking a few times. He wiped the dribble of saliva that had landed on his cheek and was now sliding down it. Wiping it on Techno's tunic, the rammed man drew his hand, the back of it making contact with Techno's cheek with a loud clap. He was stunned silent, head tilted to the side from the force of it, and his cheek was numb.

"Alright, have it your way."

The cracking of the knuckles could be heard, followed by a yelp that masked the popping of bones dislocating from its sockets as a result of the Netharian's unyielding grip. When he finally let go, Techno was shaking, teeth gritted as the searing pain from his hand made itself present.

Reaching behind for a holster at his belt, Schlatt unsheathed a dagger, small and curved, with a blade that was freshly sharpened. With a sinking feeling in his stomach, Techno glanced over Schlatt's shoulders to his left, where Tubbo sat with a horrified expression, eyes wide and filled with tears. He slowly shook his head at the boy, a silent plead to either close his eyes or look away.

"You don't have to do this," Techno mumbled out, but Schlatt wasn't having it. His patience had run thin and he had done plenty to push his already feather-light buttons. With a few rough, jagged slices, blood began to trickle down his arm as the pinky and ring finger of Technoblade's left hand was severed.

Tubbo watched on in horror, the hand gripping his chin never letting up, forcing him to watch as the extremities dropped to the ground like a piece of meat for the dogs. The worst part wasn't the sight, however. It was the sound. The noises he let out were horrifying, and he tried to grit his teeth to muffle it. It was too late, though, Tubbo had heard it all. A soldier, a warrior, a king, letting out near-screams that imprinted itself onto his mind, making his skin crawl and his blood run cold.

Satisfied with the way the boy began to tremble with muffled sobs, Alex let go, wiping the stray tears onto the pant of his legs. He stood up and made his way to the throne, taking a seat on the plush material. He propped a leg up, resting his elbow on the armrest and watching the rest of the show.

Schlatt picked up the severed fingers off the ground, shaking off the blood from the pool it laid in, and walked back over to the throne where Alex sat.

"Would you do the honours, Alex? Your handwriting was always neater than mine, anyway," he said nonchalantly, tossing the two fingers his way. Catching it in the air, Alex laughed, examining them and wrapping them around the quill.

"My pleasure. Obsidian's all yours," he said with a grin, using Techno's fingers to sign off on the document, uncaring about the smudges of blood that was now dotting the corners where he held the paper. "Next up, Emerald and Gold."

"Phil would never," Techno croaked out, voice hoarse from his agonizing screams before. He gripped his left hand tightly with his right, trying to stop the bleeding while Schlatt leaned against his throne, an amused look on his face.

"If you, the great and powerful Technoblade, were willing to give up *everything*, I know that Phil's gonna do the same. And from what little Tubbo here says, the Golds seem to be very fond of you."

Techno let his head hang now, knowing deep down that he was right.

The bond they had grown, the loyalty fostered had become a fault and while he would do it all over again, he knew that this was the end of the line. If he wasn't killed right there and then, he would lose everything regardless. They lost.

"What's gonna happen to them?" Techno asked quietly, the defeated tone of his voice doing numbers to fuel Alex and Schlatt's egos.

"To who?" Schlatt asked, a brow raised.

"The people. The nations."

The rammed man hummed in consideration.

"Well, under Netherite's rule, resources will be funnelled to the continent. The citizens will pledge allegiance to the empire of Netherite, or suffer a lifetime behind bars. No longer will the names of Emerald, Gold and Obsidian be used. There'd be no use for it when they're all under my thumb."

Alex's gaze steeled as he listened, interrupting him before he could continue.

" *Your* thumb?"

There was a beat of silence.

"Alex, not now," Schlatt warned, barely looking over his shoulder.

"Last I heard, *that* wasn't the deal," the Blackstone king continued, drawing his blade from his belt and twirling it between his fingers. "Or did you conveniently forget to mention that you were taking all the spoils?"

"Look, we can renegotiate later. What matters is that the region is under The Nether's rule," Schlatt said, sounding irritated. "You'll get to kill Dream and we'll worry about the semantics after we've secured it."

"No, I reckon we should renegotiate *now*, because it sounds to me like you planned to keep the land all to yourself."

Schlatt turned back to Alex, stepping closer as his expression softened in feign sincerity.

"Of course not. We're a team, you and I? When we've got the signatures, we'll split them up nice and you can get a fair split. This just makes our acquisition easier."

With his head tilted, Alex scanned his face, seeing the way his brow furrowed slightly and the corners of his lips pulled tautly. He knew Schlatt, and he knew that this wouldn't be his natural

reaction to things. It was calculated, deliberate. The room stood quiet for those few moments, and even breathing felt like a step out of line. With his lips pressed in a thin line, Alex leaned back into his seat.

"Fine. Carry on," he said simply.

"Thank you." Schlatt gave a nod and turned back towards Techno. "Rest assured, your people, so long as they comply, will be unharmed. Though, knowing you... I can't really say how well that'd play out. Maybe you'll think twice about building a nation on the foundations of rebellion next time."

The rammed man's grin spread across his face, barely reaching his eyes. Techno knew that his people wouldn't go down without a fight, even without him to lead them. Everything they had fought for, everything they had built, he knew that they would give up their lives if it meant trying to protect the home they had fostered. And the uncertainty of not being there to lead the battle, he mourned the families that he knew would be lost.

"That contract's never going to fly. You're not gonna get far with it," Techno mumbled, the fire in his voice dimming as he dealt with his injuries and absorbed the reality of his position.

"It doesn't need to," he said simply. "Sooner or later, Techno, you'll realise that nobody is going to say anything. Nobody is going to swoop in and save your countries because they know the things that I can do to anyone who steps out of line. They ask for a contract, I show them the contract. What are they going to do?"

Techno stayed silent, jaw clenched. Schlatt continued, reaching up to hold his face, running his fingers along the Marks, feeling the slight indentations to them.

"As for you, you'll stay here where you belong. We're your family n-

Schlatt paused mid-statement, and staring right at Techno, his expression stiffens, eyes just barely widening. He leaned back, stumbling a tiny bit and falling back into Alex, who held him up the best he could. The Blackstone king rested his chin on the man's shoulder for further support, left hand wrapping around Schlatt's torso as he dragged him back closer to the throne. The dagger that was pressed into the ram-horned man's back only pressed in deeper. Schlatt coughed, staining his white shirt with blood of his own, for once.

"You're making... a mistake," he sputtered out, kicking weakly. "Fucking... idiot..."

Drawing the knife from his back, Alex pushed Schlatt into the steps, where he coughed as the edges dug into his already bleeding body.

"You were never going to give me a fair share," Alex snarled, kneeling by his trembling body and sinking the dagger into his stomach this time, drawing a pained howl from the other Netharian. "You were going to use me, use my men to further your own goals. And to be fair, you'd probably do the same to me eventually, so I figured I might as well beat you to it."

Schlatt didn't say a word, struggling to control his breathing. Beneath him, the once polished marble steps were pooling with red, tiny waterfalls of the dark liquid dripping down the first few steps he was on. Schlatt tilted his head back and closed his eyes, teeth gritted. He let out a grunt when the dagger was removed once again, and his body lay limp.

Satisfied, Alex stood up and turned around. He had a gleam in his eyes this time, bloodlust fuelled, and Tubbo was terrified. While the situation before felt doomed, it was now extremely volatile and

seeing how easily Alex was willing to kill an ally, he could only pray he'd stay out of harm's way. A rash move, but the unexpected had its way with nourishing fear.

"Now things are getting interesting," he said with a grin, walking up to Techno. He picked up the bat from the ground, examining it for a moment before turning back to the bound man. "My turn."

"It should be this way," Dream mumbled as they walked down a hallway, with ceilings taller than the ones they'd passed before. It was quiet, but as they'd realised, sound didn't travel far through the walls.

"It must be," George agreed. "Or at least, we should be on the right path-"

"Wait, move!" Dream called out, an arm wrapping around the smaller man and pulling him to his chest and leaning against the side as another series of arrows shot straight down the hallway. With wide eyes, George stared at the end of the hallway, now littered with arrows that would have otherwise implanted themselves into his back.

"Fuck," George breathed out, adrenaline coursing through him.

"Yeah, that's what got me before," Dream said softly, kicking loose the string that they had tripped. He carefully let go of George after being sure that the coast was clear. "All good?"

"All good."

George was about to continue when he heard a yell, audible but distant. He locked eyes with Dream, who looked back with an expression that confirmed what he had heard.

"Sounded like it was this way," he mumbled, beginning to walk at a quicker pace than before. George followed along behind him, glancing down at his arm every now and then.

They stopped at a tall set of wooden doors. From the muffled voices behind it, he could tell that this was where they needed to be. Dream held an arm out, holding George behind him protectively. He glanced over his shoulder at the prince.

"Stay behind me, and keep out of conflict," he mumbled.

"Be careful," George whispered seriously, locking eyes with the empty black circles carved into the bone. Dream stared back for a moment before turning around, reaching for the harness on his thigh and drawing the dagger he had carried there. He took George's hand and closed it around the handle, leaning in to plant a quick kiss to his lips. It was brief, but there was an unspoken understanding that with the uncertainty of the situation, it could be the last time they would have the opportunity.

"I will."

Drawing his sword again, Dream pushed the door open. The voices paused and the sight before him was not what he had expected.

Halfway up the steps of the throne laid Schlatt in a pool of blood, seemingly unmoving. Alex, who was holding a bat, looked up, his expression darkening. From where he stood facing the pillar,

there was someone on the other end there who had been experiencing the brute end of his frustrations. And seeing the hog mask dropped by the end, he had an idea of who that could be.

He continued his pace forward, readjusting his grip on the sword.

"*You*," the Netharian hissed, eyes narrowing at the masked man walking forward.

"Let him go, Alex," Dream warned, keeping an even tone despite the rage bubbling up inside him.

Alex dropped the bat he was holding, leaning down to grab the battle axe that belonged to Technoblade. There was an unhinged look in his eyes now, feeling the grip of the handle in his hands. He bared his teeth, ignoring the demand.

"You *ruined* me. Stuck up little shit who thinks he's bigger than everyone."

"You ruined *yourself* when you decided to pick a fight with Emerald," Dream replied simply, grip on his sword tightening.

"Your land should belong to me. Your father would have been *happy* to work with me, but you just *had* to be difficult, didn't you?"

Dream's head tilted, though his pace didn't let up. Though aware of his late father's suspicious allies, it had never occurred to him that Blackstone's initial attack was a result of his relationship with the country while he was alive. Alex continued.

"Oh, to think that despite everything I had over him, every piece of blackmail my parents dangled over his head, all it took was a pretty boy from *Diamond* to get *you* to comply. Diamond! Hell, if I had known, I'd have fetched one ages ago."

Dream's jaw was clenched now, the flame in him ignited once again as Alex reduced George to nothing. He barely gave a second thought about what was revealed of his father. The masked man had tunnel vision locked onto his opponent who was way over his head.

"You don't get to fucking *talk* about him like that."

"Yeah? Does that make you mad?" Alex aggravated, a grin on his face.

"You're gonna find out in a second."

Alex made his way over to the other pillar, axe pointed to something out of Dream's line of sight.

"No armour. Mano a mano, or your little servant boy dies."

Dream halted in his step, the distance between him and Alex half of what it was when he came in. They were about 20 meters apart, now.

"Tubbo?" He called out, hoping that it was a bluff

"I'm okay," a quiet, trembling voice responded from behind the pillar, making his stomach sink.

Alex tilted his head smugly, daring Dream to try to do anything out of line now. Eyes trained on the Netharian, he unbuckled the chestpiece of his armor along with the forearm guards. They fell to the ground in a clatter, leaving him in nothing but his black inner shirt and pants. Alex, on the other hand, slid off his blazer, his once-pristine shirt already dotted with blood. Dream couldn't tell whose it was at this point.

"Mano a mano," Dream repeated, picking his sword up again. He cracked his knuckles and flexed the muscle of his injured arm to make sure he could move it fine. He could. "I can't *wait* to be the last thing you see before you die."

"I'm not gonna be dying tonight." Alex's expression formed a scowl at Dream's confidence. With Techno's axe drawn, he undid the top two buttons of his shirt and cracked his neck in preparation. "But you, on the other hand. You're gonna pay for making a mockery out of me."

"Always the sore loser," Dream said, a grin on his face, his mask hiding the bloodthirsty look in his eyes. With that, he stepped closer.

"You never left your fucking land until a fragile prince with a pretty face walked into the picture," Alex snarled, charging forward and closing the space between them.

A clash of metal sounded as blades of sword and axe met in a thunderous melody of steel-on-steel. The two kings danced in sync, almost equally matched, but the passion in which the Netharian swung his axe balanced out where he lacked in skill. His movements were unpredictable, making strange and bold attacks that left him exposed, but the surprises hindered Dream's quick-thinking, and he missed the chances of attacking that he could have taken.

"He's not *fragile*," Dream hissed, ducking under a sweeping attack and taking the opportunity to stab forward. The tip of the sword pierced through Alex's thigh, deep enough to hurt.

"Oh, you're gonna regret that," Alex mumbled, using his other leg to kick Dream in the face, leaving a crack along the edge of the mask. Underneath it, Dream could feel a searing pain shoot up his nose and spread across his face. A few drops of blood leaked from his nose and he wiped it off.

Quickly collecting himself, he got up, only to have the axe swing once again, slicing through his tunic and leaving a gash across his chest and arm. Though it was only a flesh wound, it was drawing quite a bit of blood. With a growl, he went in for another strike, leaving a gash on Alex's shoulder. The battle, long-overdue, waged on in a clatter of blades.

By the door, George hid behind a pillar. He had gone unnoticed, by the looks of it. With the pair so engrossed in their own conflict, the prince was able to sneak between pillars, making his way past the battling kings.

George's heart was pounding in his chest. The harsh words of Alex didn't cut quite as deep as he thought they would. After the past few weeks, his perception of his own strengths had changed and he knew that the animosity was more directed towards Dream than it was towards him. The words were a reaction to his wounded ego after the war, and the anger had festered over the course of the two years that had passed, culminating in the horrifying ruthlessness he was embodying. The ferocity in his strikes, the venom on his tongue, the last thing he wanted was to be caught on the receiving end of it. And knowing now that Dream was dealing with that, he couldn't help but worry for and admire him all the more. The occasional hiss of pain made his heart clench in his chest, but with how the clatter of metal didn't stop, he knew that Dream was doing alright.

He finally managed to sneak to the front of the grand room and curl around the pillar up ahead, where he was met with Tubbo's back facing him. He was sitting down with his side to the pillar, arms tied behind him and ankles bound together in front of him. Up on the pillar on the other end of the walkway, the identifiable silhouette of Techno could be seen, with his head hanging low and his pink hair over his face. Horrified, he noticed the amount of blood he was covered in. His arms

were chained above his head, but he could still stand, only resting some of his weight on his wrists.

“Tubbo,” George whispered urgently, carefully kneeling down behind the young boy first. Tubbo immediately looked over his shoulder, eyes wide as he heard a comfortingly familiar voice. Using the dagger that Dream had given him, he was quick to cut through the ropes that held him immobile. Once his hands were free, he helped with undoing the ropes by his ankles, before wrapping his arms around George, pulling him in for a tight hug and clinging onto him gratefully. The prince returned it, rubbing soothing circles in his back as the boy’s tears were soaked up by his top.

“I’m so glad you’re okay, Prince George.”

“Are you hurt?” he asked gently, to which Tubbo shook his head. With his hands now free, he swiped the bit of dried blood from his neck where Alex had barely pierced before.

“Nothing much, but... Techno...”

His voice cracked at the mention, body beginning to tremble slightly. The young boy couldn’t bear to look at the ruler strung from the pillar, meekly pointing towards the pink-haired man. George felt his heart sink, realising that whatever had happened, the boy likely saw through all of it. It was more than someone his age should be forced to handle, more than *anyone* should be forced to handle.

“You stay here, alright? Keep out of sight and stay quiet, I’m going to help him free.”

Once getting a nod in response, George peeked around the curve of the marble. He waited for the opportune moment when Alex’s back was to the throne to make a run across to the other pillar. Techno was conscious, but he looked rough. Sensing his presence in front of him, Techno lifted his head. Knowing that his mask was off, George kept his gaze averted, purposefully avoiding his face. Instead, he stood on his tiptoes and worked on trying to break the locks around his wrists with the dagger. It was a gruesome sight, and only up close did he notice the missing fingers, severed above the knuckles. It took a lot of self-restraint to keep from throwing up at the mere sight.

“Thank god you’re safe, at least. Dream would’ve lost it otherwise,” his voice spoke, hoarser than usual.

“I’m glad you’re alive, thank you for coming,” George replied quietly, still trying to respect his privacy. “Sorry, your, uh...”

“It’s alright. No reason to hide it anymore,” Techno said gently. The prince finally looked at him, his first glance at the man’s face, red eyes meeting brown’s and at that moment, he froze.

George would never be one to judge someone on their appearance, nor would he hold anything against someone for being of a different continent, even Netharians. He was simply not that kind of person. But the surprise of seeing Techno’s red eyes for the first time and seeing the indented marks across his cheekbones stunned him speechless.

“You’re...” George didn’t know what to say.

“Yeah. I am.”

George nodded, still taking a moment to process the new information, and Techno watched on expectantly. The negative reaction he had anticipated never came. Instead, he met with concerned eyes.

“Let’s get you out of here.”

Beyond the pillar, the fight was getting gruesome and the words exchanged during the battle were growing more venomous. Alex had taken another good hit on Dream’s forearm as he dodged a moment too late, leaving behind a gash that would surely be bleeding for a bit.

“Say hi to Schlatt when you see him,” Alex panted, taking another hammering swing towards Dream’s chest, which he dodged but not enough. This left another cut along his stomach, his face contorting in pain.

“Say hi to him yourself,” Dream spat, seizing forward while Alex was reeling for another swing of the heavy axe.

His sword pierced through Alex’s stomach and time paused for a moment. The Netharian dropped the battle-axe, eyes wide and for the first time that night, a glimpse of fear flickered through them. Dream twisted the sword, drawing a cry of pain, before kicking Alex down, letting his body fall with a thud as his hands clutched his now bleeding stomach.

“Wait,” Alex pleaded feebly, “ *Stop*, alright, I yield. You win.”

Dream said nothing in response, merely kicking the battle-axe aside so that it was out of his reach.

“Dream, please, fuck.”

His voice was garbled now as he struggled to breathe. A pool of his own blood was beginning to form underneath him. Dream couldn’t help his satisfaction seeing his enemy, the man who tried to take so much from him, begging to be spared. He pressed the bleeding tip of the sword to Alex’s chin, forcing his head up.

“Does it hurt?”

Seeing the tears in his eyes made his heart swell.

“Yes, fuck, *please*, I’ll do anything, I-” Alex could barely form full sentences now, the fear and pain coursing through his body, leaving his verbal ability completely stunted.

"We're not so different, you and I," the masked king began, lifting the bone mask from his face and glaring down with piercing green eyes that marked his enemy's last breaths.

He tossed it to the ground, before pressing his foot down on the trembling man's chest. Ignoring the pleading and clawing, he raised his sword above his head, body taut, using all his strength when he snapped back down like a rubber band.

"I've got a bit of an ego myself."

The room went silent, nothing but a ringing in Dream’s ears.

With his sword now rooted in Alex’s chest, the begging went quiet as soul drained out of his brown eyes, leaving him staring up at the ceiling with a petrified expression. The last exhale left his body and Dream was left panting, staring down at the now lifeless body with his hands still

clutching the sword that was embedded in it.

From around the pillar, George walked over with slow, tentative steps. Carefully unwrapping Dream's hands from the weapon, he cupped his cheek gently, tearing his eyes from the corpse beneath them. His mouth was moving, but Dream only tuned back in a second later.

"Huh?"

"Can you hear me?"

"I... Yeah," Dream said, snapping out of his haze. He noticed George's cheeks were stained with tears and he had a smile on his face.

"God, I'm so glad you're okay. We're gonna get out of here, yeah?" George assured, reaching down to Alex's hip to grab the set of keys hanging from his belt.

"Yeah... I'm gonna sit down," he said, sounding drowsy.

George guided him to one of the pillars, helping him slide down carefully and lean his back against it.

"Of course."

From where he sat, Tubbo came running over. Knowing that Alex was dead now, he knew it was safe and the worry of Dream not winning the battle had been eating him alive the past minute he spent waiting behind the pillar. The past few days had also given him plenty of time to let his guilt about spilling secrets fester. With that, he was certain he had fucked up and Dream would be upset at him. He kneeled by Dream's side despite the scabs on his knees still healing. Giving them some privacy, George rushed back to Techno with the keys.

"King Dream, I'm so, so sorry. They said nobody would get hurt if I told them, but I didn't know--"

Dream brought a gentle hand to Tubbo's shoulder, silencing him with a weak smile. He rested his head against the pillar but looked over at the boy with little expression on his face. It was paling now, and while he was still catching his breath after the intense duel and loss of blood, he felt light-headed.

"I'm glad you're okay," he said simply, sliding his hand up to Tubbo's head and ruffling his hair affectionately. "Let's get you home, yeah?"

"Yeah. Thank you," Tubbo said with a smile, though the tears continued to fall down his cheeks.

The locks finally clicked open and Techno rubbed his wrists gently. Now that he could, he tore a piece of fabric from his tunic and wrapped it around his hand tightly. Looking up at George, he gave a grateful nod. Now that he was mobile, he seemed to be more awake.

"Thank you," he said quietly, voice still hoarse.

"Of course. Can you walk fine?"

The taller ruler took a few steps forward, cracking his neck.

"Yeah. Just a lot of bruising, don't think there's any internal bleeding goin' on."

“And your hand?”

“It’ll be fine.”

A cough from the steps interrupted their conversation. Their heads turned at Schlatt, who was still laying on the ground, but his eyes were peeked open now. He couldn’t lift his head, but he scanned the room from where he laid. His breathing was shallow and had a rattle to it.

“Good job,” Schlatt rasped.

Techno approached him slowly, expression darkened. The calm anger was ever-present.

“Remember when I said I’d never be like you?” The king asked, reaching for Alex’s dagger that was discarded next to him.

“Are you gonna make the same mistake as before? Leave me alive?” Schlatt taunted, despite the flipped dynamic now. He was at Techno’s mercy, yet he didn’t seem to care. To him, he’d win either way. Having Techno be too weak to kill him, or having Techno kill him, turning into the bloodthirsty warrior he so despised.

He was harmless now, immobile and bound to die, they both knew that. But if he could ignite one last bout of bloodlust in the king, he would die content.

And so, the ruler sat by the steps, next to where the king lay limp.

“The difference between then and now,” Techno began, “is that you’re going to die regardless of what I do. Only thing that I *can* change is how long you’re sufferin’ for.”

Techno brought the knife up to Schlatt’s throat. The Netherite King closed his eyes, his head lifted by a hand gripping one of the horns on his head.

“I’ll sleep well tonight with my family knowing that I’ve shown you an act of mercy you don’t deserve.”

Once again, Schlatt fell limp, sprawled across the stairs as he sputtered and choked on his own blood, but this time, there was no way he was getting up.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for following me through this journey. Two chapters left, and I'm incredibly grateful for each and every one of you who commented and left a kudos, reading it all genuinely makes my day and sometimes I'll read some comments over and over again hehe. I do have vague ideas for a sequel if enough people are interested, but nothing fleshed out yet. As always, enjoy, and let me know what you think <3

Also, my amazingly talented friend and beta reader DarkDollYumi drew Schlatt with the red bat and marks of the nether! This is just how I pictured him, and I love it very much. Chuck her a follow on youtube, she does adorable animatics

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCo7g9rz5LjsTlg-23GT47Ow>

https://cdn.discordapp.com/attachments/790225811855900712/827064009113993226/IMG_202104

Also I have a twitter now? I don't post much, but you can chuck a follow if you'd like
[@prelovedsinner](#)

Home When I'm With You

Chapter Summary

The creaking of the anchor being lifted marked the beginning of the quiet, calm epilogue where they could finally be at peace. The looming sense of trepidation that had been lingering finally faded as they set sail.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Techno slowly stood up from the stairs, dropping the dagger. With all tension leaving his body, he couldn't help but smile at George, who watched it all with a solemn expression on his face. Not a bloodthirsty kind, but one of peace. His debt has been paid, the chapter closed. The lingering taste of blood in his mouth seemed all but forgotten and he stepped forward. But he looked past George, seeing Dream sitting against the pillar, and his smile faltered. Tubbo had pulled Dream's shirt up to his chest, seeing the whole of the gash on his stomach, and the tail end of another higher up and the edge of another one higher up. Noticing Techno's expression, the prince turned around.

Seeing that Dream was still sitting, pale and barely emoting, he rushed over, Techno only a few steps behind.

"Dream? Are you alright?" George asked quietly, cupping his cheek with cautious hands. "Can you hear me?"

Dream nodded, albeit only a slight movement. His eyes were half-lidded, and he looked up at his prince. His hand lifted to hold George's close to his cheek, cold to the touch with a sheen of sweat.

"Yeah, just... Exhausted." His eyes fluttered close, but from the controlled breathing, he was still conscious and listening.

"Dream..?" Tubbo's brows knitted in concern, slowly lowering his shirt again.

"He's lost a lot of blood," Techno noted with a soft frown. "He's fine, he just needs to rest."

"But we should get out of here," George said quietly. "The quicker we get back, the better."

"Yeah," Techno sighed, "I know. Tubbo, can you take his mask for him?"

Tubbo did as told while George reached down for Techno's axe, which was clutched in Alex's hands. He figured if they were walking out of there, they should be prepared for conflict. But just as he bent over, Techno stopped him.

"You... should take Dreams instead. I don't think I'll be needing that anymore," he said.

George paused, withdrawing his hand. Instead, he stood up, looking away as he unsheathed the sword from the lifeless body. The quiet squelching sound made him cringe slightly, but it slid out with little resistance, thankfully.

Using his good hand on the king's back, Techno carefully lifted Dream from the marble pillar.

With his other forearm underneath his legs, he carried him so that the Emerald king faced the ceiling, ensuring his largest injuries would not be subjected to additional pressure or friction. A quiet grunt left him, his bruises from the bat making him grimace slightly. His left hand was also giving him a bit of grief, as the adrenaline was to wear off soon enough. Still, he carried Dream out of the throne room, the other two following in stride.

"I can walk," Dream argued, though he sounded far away. He was drifting, not only speaking quieter, but his usual cadence dampened and muted. Techno glanced down at him, a tiny bell of amusement going off in him.

"Course, you can, buddy. I believe you."

The strength of the original team of five that they entered with thankfully remained the same. As they saw the kings they were waiting for, they were quick to make their way back to the docks along with the troops they arrived with.

"Tubbo!"

When Niki spotted Tubbo in the crowd, she rushed over, her arms instantly wrapping around the boy and holding him tightly to her chest. Her eyes were brimming with tears. The response was instantaneous, Tubbo hugging her back with all his heart.

And in that moment, the realisation came washing over. His friends, loved ones, came to his rescue. They were all here and the days he spent on grazed knees, fed barely any scraps, wondering if this was how he would go, dissipated with the warmth of that embrace. The memories lingered, but the weight and fear no longer had a hold on him. The floodgates opened and he let out full-bodied sobs, hugging his friend closer.

They were safe. They were safe, and he could breathe again.

The creaking of the anchor being lifted marked the beginning of the quiet, calm epilogue where they could finally be at peace. The looming sense of trepidation that had been lingering finally faded as they set sail.

George ran his fingers through Dream's hair. The sea breeze had been toying with it since the vessel started its journey homebound. The soft blonde strands between his fingertips served as a tether of sorts, keeping him grounded and present. The past few days had been a wreck and if not for the relaxed expression of the man resting his head on the prince's lap, he would probably have gone back to it, slipping back into his mind as he had been.

But now he had something to focus on and admire. The curve of his lashes, the way all the muscles in Dream's face were relaxed, leaving his lips just barely parted, the old scar tissue across his face leaving indentations that he wanted to run his fingers across and kiss. They were all a part of him, and he wanted to savour every bit he could.

"I was so worried about you," George spoke idly, bringing his hand to cup Dream's face. The king peeked an eye open just barely, looking up at his prince with a smile, small but present.

"Yeah? I wasn't the one who was kidnapped," he teased lightly, letting his eyes close again.

"I'm not the one who almost bled out."

Dream was quiet for a beat.

"Touché."

The quiet rolling of the ocean's tide lulled them back to a comfortable calm. So many words could be said, but they kept their exchanges brief, George letting Dream rest and Dream biting his tongue to save his words for when he was more clear-headed.

He didn't want to profess his heartfelt truths too fully, wasting his emotions through poorly-strung words that could barely begin to express the intensity of it all. His gratefulness, his admiration, his love. When he is of sounder mind, he will put pen to paper and do them justice. Use the prettiest language to confess his most vulnerable thoughts, with melodious lines that will sing praises to a tune only George would understand. But until then, he settled for the quiet company, occasional exchanges, lingering glances.

His mind was already trying to piece together the best way to say 'I love you'.

"Does it hurt?" George asked out of the blue. Dream looked up at him, brows knitted slightly as his hairs tickled his eyelids.

"What does?"

George gave him a look, making Dream laugh lightly. He reached blindly for a moment, before finding George's left hand. He laced their fingers together with a tenderness that made George's heart skip a beat.

"Right, sorry. But yeah, it does. Nothing I can't handle though, darlin', don't you worry."

George smiled softly, running his thumb along the heel of Dream's hand, rising to feel the dip in his palm and read the stories the ridges told. The fate and love lines spoke of them, spoke of their shared lives together in the past, present and future. They affirmed their feelings, promised them that this was how things were meant to be. In fine print, they teased him for taking so long to realise.

"I'd still take it away if I could," was all George could say, gently lifting Dream's shirt again. His torso was wrapped now, with proper bandages they could get together. "The pain, I mean."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I'd get to pluck the thorns from your flowers, for once."

"I'd never let you," Dream said with a small laugh. His cheeks bloomed with faint colour, seeping through the pale appearance.

"Doesn't matter. I'd take it all away."

"It's really not that bad. I'd do it all over again if it meant you could be safe. Everyone who tries to hurt you, I'll make sure they get what they deserve, even if it means getting a scratch or two."

George bit his lip gently, a shy smile bringing crescents to his cheeks.

"And I thank you for that. You've done so much for me, and I wish I knew how to repay you."

"George," Dream said fondly, lifting their laced fingers to his lips and planting a kiss on the soft skin of his knuckles. "Your presence is a blessing all on its own."

With that, they fell back into another comfortable silence, enjoying the view.

And across the blanket of the sea, the sun was beginning to dip its toes into the gentle waves. The sky was painted a gorgeous hue of pinks and oranges alike. The gleam of reflecting sun rays were like tiny embers, sparking for brief moments before disappearing with the shifting tides. They moved in harmonious unison, coming and going, working together to create a masterpiece that George had never seen before, a work of art he wouldn't dream to paint in fear of unworthy eyes gazing upon its beauty.

On the other end of the ship, Techno sat on the deck, leaning against the wooden barriers. While his gaze rested ahead at nothing, his mind was elsewhere, reflecting on what had happened and the consequences that might arise as a result of it.

He was content, don't get him wrong. Knowing his family would be safe from the tyrannical imperialism made it easy for him to rest without the weight of a boulder on his chest. But with his dominant swing hand compromised, he wasn't sure if he could wield an axe like he used to.

"Y'alright, mate?"

Techno looked up. Wilbur, walking over, took a seat next to him, handing him a mug of ale. With a grateful smile, he took it, taking a tentative sip.

"I guess this is what takes up our storage, huh?" Techno mumbled, despite the slight smile on his lips. Wilbur gave his shoulder a gentle nudge.

"Ah, well. It was onboard, that's all that matters. Don't kick up a fuss now, big man. Unless you wanna give me your share, which, by all means--"

Techno cut him off with a small laugh.

"Alright, alright. Thank you for the alcohol."

"'Course. Figured you might need something to take the edge off," the prince said with a soft smile. Techno hummed in agreement, feeling the burn on his throat and warmth blooming in his chest. "How's your hand?"

"Hurts, but I'll manage. The medic patched it up better than I did, though." He flexed his fingers slightly, appreciating the dexterity he had now that the bandage was applied properly. It was strange, he could almost still feel himself moving the other two. If he closed his eyes, he could pretend they were still there.

"I'm sure. It looked rough," Wilbur said sympathetically. Messy from the long day they had just experienced, he brushed his hair from his face. "How are you feeling, though?"

"I don't know," Techno admitted. Wilbur hummed, a gentle urge to keep going. "Weird. I mean, I feel great knowing Schlatt's out of the picture for good. It went down how we'd hoped. Y'know, Tubbo and George are safe, nobody died."

"But?"

"But I don't really know what's next. I fought for a country. Years I spent building it from nothing, turning it into something, and protecting it. And now it's safe, and it doesn't really need me for the same reasons it used to. It's peaceful from here on out, but this... this is all I've ever *known*. Who am I if not a warrior?"

"You're still Technoblade. The war is over, but that doesn't mean your role in the kingdom is obsolete."

Techno made a noise of disagreement, nose scrunched up in disbelief, but Wilbur continued regardless.

"Look, you've still got loads to do. Being a king doesn't mean just minding your own business and being a little hermit. You've got people to meet, paperwork to organize, events to attend. You're looked up to, not only by your people, but by everyone else in The Overworld."

Technoblade stared down at the mug in his hand, watching the tiny bubbles on the surface clearing out and restoring his warped reflection. His unmasked face, red eyes yielding a less saturated shade than it had mere hours ago. The usually brutish sight had given way, dropping the faceless, stoic demeanour it once held.

And strangely, it had been a while since he'd really, properly looked at himself like that.

And strangely, he wasn't upset with what he saw.

"Then maybe I hadn't been much of a king, huh," he said thoughtfully. Wilbur didn't respond.

"Maybe I can get to fixing that, then. Learn the ropes proper."

"And this time you'll have us by your side."

Techno looked over, finding that Wilbur was looking back at him with warm, tentative eyes. The effects of the alcohol were noticeable from his tinted cheeks and big smile, and it made the past few hours worth it again. Wrapping an arm around his brother, he raised his mug up and Wilbur clinked it with his own instantly.

An overwhelming wave of gratitude washed over Techno as he embraced his brother, his wrapped hand resting against the brunette's back.

"I never thanked you for being so kind to me despite everything.

"You don't have to."

"I... I've never been good with family, but... you know."

"I know."

"I love you."

"I love you too."

The next time he came to, George had his face buried in Dream's good shoulder, just shy of the injuries on his torso. It was dark out by now, probably late into the night. Despite his aching body, waking up inches from the king's serene expression eased any hints of discomfort he may have harboured. Or, rather, made him forget about them for that short while. The wind tickling his

delicate lashes, the slow lift of his chest at each inhale, it stole his breath over and over again. The colour was returning to his face, from what he could tell in the lighting.

God, George had never seen such beauty in his life. The tender, masculine, calm sort of beauties he'd imagine out of greek gods and ethereal creatures of the sort.

Pulling his attention from the man before him, he became aware of a muted light casting it's warmth upon them. It wasn't there when they fell asleep, he noted. Rubbing his eyes with his grazed knuckles, he slowly sat up but not before nuzzling his head a tiny bit closer for a second, relishing in the warmth.

The light that his eyes met with were unfamiliar, but from the eager atmosphere on the ship, he knew it was a safe one.

"Dream," he whispered, leaning down. "I think we're here."

Seeing the way his face scrunched out slightly as he stirred, George felt his heart melt all over again. He finally peeked an eye open, a soft smile lifting to his lips as his wandering gaze fell upon the man leaning over him.

"Am I still dreaming, or are you an angel?" He mumbled in an octave lower than usual. The rumble in his voice was noticeable as well, having just woken up from a deep slumber.

George held back his laugh, but he couldn't help the smile that rose to his lips.

"Oh, shut up. We're docking soon. Just thought I'd wake you up now so you wouldn't be groggy when we actually need to leave."

"How considerate. Where are we docking, again?"

George paused, glancing up and trying to squint at the shore.

"I'm not really sure, actually. Do you want me to check?"

Dream grimaced as he sat up slowly, scooting to lean against the wooden barriers. George's eyes furrowed in concern and his hand darted to Dream's back to help guide him. The king mumbled a soft 'thank you' as he leaned his head back, jaw tensed slightly.

"No need. It's probably Gold, these are their ships, anyway."

George took the spot next to him, legs outstretched. He was still tired, likely more mental than physical. Dream, on the other hand, still looked exhausted. The injuries were really taking a toll on him, and even sitting up brought discomfort. Noticing this, George reached for the flask of water not far away and handed it to the king. Dream took it carefully, smiling gratefully. He wrapped his arm around George, who was caught off guard, but leaned in regardless, content with their proximity. The quiet, thirsty chugging of water was a surprisingly intimate affair, and George rested his head against Dream's when he was done.

"Thank you for coming after me," he said quietly. "I wasn't sure. You risked so much, just for me,"

Turning his head, Dream rested his chin on the smaller boy's for a moment, before shifting to plant a gentle kiss to the top of it.

"I'd do it all over again if it meant you'd be safe."

The sound of the anchor being lowered cut through the air, and opening his eyes again, he saw a smaller figure approaching them, a familiar carved piece of bone in his hand. Dream set down the flask and reached for it gratefully.

"I thought we left it back in the throne room. Thank you, Tubbs."

"Of course. I'm glad you're okay, Dream," he said with a warm smile. "Are you ready to go home?"

"I am. But you're not coming back to the castle with me tonight."

The sweet expression morphed to one of confusion, but before he could ask any questions, Dream cut him off.

"You're heading home with your family. You have a birthday to celebrate, don't you?"

"Are you sure? You're hurt, I should probably be taking care of you these days-"

"I'm sure."

"-and helping you keep things in order while you're healing-"

"Tubbo."

"-or bringing you your food and stuff to bed, I mean, you need to rest-"

"Tubbo."

The boy finally paused, looking up.

"I'll be fine. If you're really worried you can come visit, but you're off duty until we figure out something better for you."

With a soft smile, Tubbo nodded gratefully.

"Thank you, Dream."

Reaching his hand out, Dream faced his palm out towards the boy, closing and unclosing his fingers to beckon him closer. Tubbo let out a laugh and leaned his head forward towards his palm. Dream ruffled his hair, messing it up playfully. The commotion of moving parts as a ramp was extended towards the dock could be heard in the distance, drawing their attention towards the other side of the ship for a second.

"Tommy's probably waiting for you, why don't you get over there and meet him?" Dream waved off as he slowly fastened the buckles behind his head. "I need to tell George something."

"You had the whole six hours to do that," Tubbo teased lightly, though his attention was divided, a glint in his eye at the mention of his best friend. "But yeah, I need to go apologise to him anyway. I was supposed to see him yesterday, I think."

Dream could only laugh, letting a blush rise to his cheek, and George did the same, looking down to hide it. Tubbo left them to their own devices, eager to lean against the railing to greet Tommy.

Left alone again, the pair now looked at one another, George flicking between the black circles where Dream's eyes were. They weren't nearly as empty now that he knew the person behind them. Now that he's seen the way he laughs, the way he cries, the way his tone smoothens down with

ginger caution when they were in their own world. He couldn't help but see the green irises in place of those.

"Are you going to be okay heading home after all that? You know, you're always welcome in Diamond. Our nurses can help you." The prince reached up to brush a stray bit of dirt from the mask, allowing his eyes to flicker down to the lips below even if for a brief moment.

"I'll be okay. I should be in my own bed after everything." His hand lifted up to cup George's cheek, brushing his thumb along it. His expression, hidden behind the mask, showed nothing but admiration and appreciation for the man before him. "Oh, George... I have so much to say, but I don't think I have enough blood in my body to keep my tongue as sharp as I'd like it to be. And you, my prince, are worthy of more than the words of a man half-awake."

"I'd take those words if it meant I could have them now," George said, leaning into his touch and letting his eyes flutter closed. "I want everything you can give. Even if it's not your best work, every line you convey does more to my heart than you know."

"I know. I know, and you're too kind to me." Their foreheads were pressed together now, the solid material against George's tender skin. "But I'll save them because you deserve nothing shy of perfection. I know I can give that to you, I just need a bit of time."

They pulled apart moments after, the ship-wide commotion as soldiers began filing out and onto the wooden pier. The next few hours were a blur to George, the feeling of Dream's hand sliding from his face replaying over and over again.

They had parted ways, Dream whisked away rather quickly as he was loaded onto a carriage, and George exchanged greetings with King Philza.

He remembered Tommy and Tubbo hugging by the pier, one of them wracked with sobs that made the both of them tremble. He couldn't tell which one it was.

He remembered the feeling of Sapnap's arms around him. He remembered the smell of ambergris in the air, the taste of his own tears as his best friend's warm embrace offered him a safe shoulder to cry on. He remembered the quiet ride home, clinging onto his friend's arm in silence.

He remembered frozen snippets of passing faces as he arrived home, the distant sounds of cheers that he was finally back. He remembered the sobs of joy as his parents held him close, telling him how happy they were that he was safe. And he remembered falling asleep, the physical and emotional exhaustion finally reaching his bones and dragging him into a peaceful and much-needed slumber.

Waking up properly the next day felt surreal. A warm bed, soft covers, a gentle breeze. After the long night spent on the cold floor, he had grown used to the slight grime on his skin, the hard concrete, damp and disgusting. But this... this was home. It felt foreign by now, like a memory long-forgotten, but it felt familiar. And the slight humidity in the atmosphere was definitely a breath of fresh air in comparison to waking up in dry heat.

When George creaked his eyes open the next morning, it was almost as though it had all been a dream. It could have been, the memories hazy as the slumber blurred his thoughts. Maybe it was all just some messed up nightmare. Maybe he was imagining the rope burns on his wrists and cuts

on his fingertips.

But regardless, he was home now. He was safe.

"Morning, your highness."

Looking over to his side, Sapnap laid next to him above the covers, hugging one of his plush pillows.

"Good morning," George mumbled, rubbing his eyes. "You're here early."

"It's two o'clock," his friend pointed out, making George jolt up in surprise.

"Two o'clock-"

"And besides, I'm not here early. I never left."

The prince paused, relaxing again. He looked down at Sapnap, seeing the expression on his face, and he knew that it really wasn't a dream.

Although the advisor was relaxed and at ease, the signs of stress were still present. Half-lidded, sunken eyes, facial hair growing out a little more than its usually trimmed length. In just a day, he seemed to have aged a few years. His disappearance had given his friend a lot of grief. And knowing this, he felt his heart sink a tiny bit.

"You slept over?" George finally asked, laying back down on the pillow. His brows furrowed slightly, the sleep wearing off slowly but surely.

Sapnap carefully took George's hand, examining the wrists wrapped delicately with bandages.

"Course I did. Had to make sure you were okay."

"They patched me up, I'm fine." The prince let him check the bandages anyway.

"I know that."

There was a pause between them, Sapnap carefully unwrapping the dressings for his wounds (which, honestly, would have healed fine on their own, but the nurse insisted) and wrapping them back in place.

"Are... Are *you* okay?" George finally asked. The advisor looked up, head tilted a bit in confusion.

"Me?"

"Of course, who else?"

Sapnap laughed, almost disbelievingly.

"You get kidnapped and you ask if I'm okay?"

"Sap," he said gently. "We should talk about it eventually."

Sapnap looked up at him with a warm smile.

"What's there to talk about? You're safe and that's all that matters."

"You just... look rough is all."

This drew a laugh from the advisor.

“Wow, thanks.”

“That’s not what I meant and you know it,” George said, unable to stop the smile that rose to his face.

“Fine, fine.” The laughter mellowed down, hints of it lingering in his voice as he conceded. No matter how heavy the topic, the company was always inviting enough, familiar enough to smile in. “I was scared, obviously, when I found the note. I was scared, and then I was angry.”

“Angry?” George mumbled curiously, earning a hum of affirmation.

Sapnap was looking up at the ceiling now, the tip of the bolster he was cradling was tucked under his chin. George considered asking, but he stayed quiet and let the man take his time. There were a lot of thoughts to organize, after all. He swallowed.

“Like, the world wasn’t fair to us. The one person I had left, my best friend. You were finally putting yourself out there, hanging out with someone you liked, being *happy*. And the universe said ‘get fucked’,” Sapnap says bitterly, his usually strong arms clutching the pillow like a child to his stuffie. “Not only that, but I’m supposed to be your advisor, right? Protect you, learn from the court and guide you and stuff. ‘I bring the brain, you bring the heart’ type deal. And I couldn’t even do that.”

“You didn’t blame yourself, did you?” George scolded lightly, pulling the pillow from his grasp and scooting in to give his friend a hug. Sapnap buried his head in his shoulder.

“For a bit, but then the anger kicked in and I just wanted him dead. But that’s all, I swear. I’m just... I’m glad you’re back, George. Honestly.”

Rubbing Sapnap’s back gently, George found comfort in knowing he was safe in his friend’s arms. With his other hand, he brushed through Sapnap’s hair, closing his eyes.

“I’m glad I’m back too. I missed you, thank you for keeping me company last night,” George mumbled, appreciating the warmth enveloping him.

And in the smallest voice, Sapnap replied, honest and nervous, one of the more vulnerable sides he’d only show George, “I didn’t want you to get taken away again.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi! Sorry this one took so long, my attention's been pretty divided. BUT I've been writing short little one-shots that you can check out! I've been posting sneak peeks on my twitter as well, @prelovedsinner.

Seeing the traction this fic has gotten just on AO3 alone is so cool??? Thank you so much for 10k reads AND 500 kudos, it's honestly so ridiculously sweet and it makes me so happy to know that people enjoy it so far. Bear with me, the last chapter might take longer than a week as well because of assignments, but I really am trying my best!

Also, I'm thinking of doing starting another fic after EFT and before the sequel, but I'm

not sure? So basically it's a music store AU where George starts working at a music store just to see Dream, who's a massive music lover with a grunge-y bad boy aesthetic. I don't have a plot for it yet, only vague scenes in my head, but the one-shot is already up, it's called Cigarette Daydreams. Would you guys prefer to see that first or should I save that for after EFT's sequel?

More Than Life Itself

Chapter Summary

Love and Life are one in the same.

Chapter Notes

Hey! It's been a while. I'd really recommend re-reading earlier chapters if you've been following along for a while. Or, well, at least chapter 8. Wilbur and Niki's dynamic has been rewritten since the last update, and Chapter 8 is especially good if you need context. Thank you, happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Slowly."

"It's so cold," the king complained.

"You've dealt with worse, quit complaining," George laughed.

"It's literally in the middle of winter, I really don't know what you expect from me-"

"It's warmer in the water!"

"You're the one telling me to go slow!"

George helped Dream as he carefully lowered into the warm stream of water. His shirt was off, but his torso was covered pretty securely in bandages. As they waded a little farther out, they reached to a depth deep enough to reach their necks when they sat down.

The both of them did just that, their undergarments not doing much to cushion their seats as they settled into the rocky surface below. George situated himself behind Dream, his gentle fingers touching the now-wet bandages hugging his back. It made the king shudder a tiny bit, but George assumed it was because of the cold air rather than the brush of his fingertips.

"See? That's better, isn't it?"

"Yeah," Dream hummed, relaxing and pulling his ankles closer to himself, opting to sit cross-legged. "It's warm."

"Alright, I'm gonna take the bandages off now, okay?"

"Yeah. How much quicker is this supposed to heal, again?" Dream asked, looking over his shoulder at George as the smaller man began to slowly unravel the latticed cloth. Dream let out a quiet hiss as they loosened, the water making contact with the injuries on his chest and stomach, but he relaxed within seconds as the pain faded.

“About half the time it'd usually take. It's not going to take the scar away, but it's going to speed up the process a bit.”

Once the bandages were off, folded into a wet little mound in his hands, George waded to the edge to set it down with their other belongings. Admittedly, the missing warmth radiating from behind him made Dream pout a tiny bit. He looked over his shoulder again, letting his eyes linger over George's back. He watched the way his muscles moved under his skin as he wrung it dry and admired the shimmering droplets covering his back as he leaned forward to set it on the rocks.

“You're gonna need it if you wanna be fit and ready for the Banquet in Gold, it's only a week away and... What?”

As George turned back around, Dream blushed faintly, but he didn't look away.

“C'mere,” Dream said softly, turning in place so he was facing George better. “It's still cold.”

George came by, sitting next to Dream and letting the blonde wrap his arms around him. He rested his head gingerly against his shoulder, keeping pressure from the wound on his arm. As he was pulled closer, basically in Dream's lap, he couldn't help but smile and close his eyes.

“It really is freezing,” George agreed gently. “You're warm, though.”

“It's your fault,” Dream mumbled, burying his face in the crook of George's neck. “You got me blushin' and everything.”

Amused, George asked, “Why are you blushing?”

“I always am when you're around.”

With that, George cupped Dream's cheek, carefully lifting it so their eyes could meet.

The sky was dimming now, and it was funny how they always found themselves in the midst of a sunset, but George looked forward to seeing the ethereal glow of the creek's stream, and he was eager to see the way the blue hues emanating from the water would dance on Dream's face, blanketing his freckles and casting shadows across his features. Just like in his dream many nights ago, but better.

George leaned in, and Dream leaned in as well. It was natural this time, and there was no hesitation as they let their lips meet gently, letting it linger for a few moments more before Dream pulled back.

His emerald pupils were dilated, shades of sea-glass refracting the setting sun's light and denying George of his breath again. And on the other end of that exchange, Dream was just as stunned by the way his damp brown hair fell so perfectly across his forehead, in neat-yet-messy curls.

“Thank you for giving me a chance,” Dream said softly. “Despite how apprehensive you were, I'm glad you gave me a chance.”

Now it was George's turn to blush. He let out a soft laugh.

“Hmm, I don't know, I might start to regret that soon,” he teased lightly, causing a grin to break out onto Dream's originally serious expression.

“What? No, you wouldn't.”

"Really? I think I should, though."

"Please George, my love, what have I done wrong?"

"You've put my life before your own," George said, splashing water at him with a grin of his own.

"Of course, *oh*, what a sin," Dream said dramatically, tilting his head back.

"Indeed. Gifting us the Dust of Emerald had already toed the threshold, but saving me the way you did? You fear no god."

The king pulled him closer by the waist, a lovesick smile overtaking his features.

"How could I possibly make it up to you?"

George let out a thoughtful hum and pretended to ponder over this.

"A selfish act," he responded, letting his gaze trail down Dream's neck, along his arm, to where the water hugged their torsos close. "I demand you do something for yourself and your own joy."

"Is that ethical, my dear prince? An act as selfish might be a crime in itself."

Dream was leaning in again, forcing George's full attention back on him. He gazed into the sweet honey irises, lit up with the earthy colours he so loved. If a god did exist, Dream would thank him for the years he spent crafting those eyes. He was enraptured.

"I give you my blessing. You're in my land, after all."

"Then I shall steal a kiss," Dream hummed, the corner of his lips lifting to a smile. "Because I want to. I shall claim your lips as mine."

George let his eyes flutter close and closed the gap between them, letting himself be spun between Dream's careful fingers.

"Then I shall let you."

It was a strangely familiar feeling, putting on a nice outfit while his mother fussed over his outfit. This time, however, it was a very different mood. It was assured, relaxed. They were all smiles this time around, and with Sapnap standing by George's door.

"Darling- Oh, I forget, what was that nickname George calls you? Sap?" Queen Davidson asked, looking over at the advisor. The smile on his face grew, eyes scrunching up in amusement.

"Sapnap, your highness. How can I be of service?"

"Right, right! Sapnap, dear, can you *please* tell George his hair looks better slicked back?"

The prince let out a groan, though his smile never wavered.

"Mum, I look dumb with my hair flat," he argued, his tone light-hearted. "Besides, the crown sits better like this."

“George, darling, I promise I’ll drop the subject if Sapnap agrees with you.”

The advisor’s eyes widened slightly as both eyes landed on him, waiting expectantly for him to make a decision. His eyes flickered between the two, and god, he so badly wanted to agree with the queen just to annoy George. He knew that his friend would never forgive him. Still, he decided to have mercy.

“I’m sorry, your highness, but I’m gonna have to agree with Prince George on this one. He looks good with his hair a little messy like this.”

The queen pouted, brushing through George’s hair with her fingers before placing the diadem on his head. It sat nicely, light tufts of hair cupping the silver in the design.

“Fine, fine. I’ll leave you be. You may be a mature adult, but you’re still my little boy.”

George wrapped his arms around her, resting his chin on her shoulder.

“I know. I’m always going to be your little boy.”

With that, the queen planted a gentle kiss to his forehead.

“Let’s head out, then. Sapnap, are you ready?”

Sapnap blinked a few times, looking up at the queen blankly.

“Me?”

“Of course, it’s a banquet. You didn’t know you were coming?”

“I- No? I’m not really dressed for a banquet, your highness,” Sapnap said with wide eyes. He glanced down at his outfit - his regular casual dressing, with his light blue shirt tucked into his pants.

"Loads of people are going to be there. Of course you're coming, we might get to match you up with someone lovely," George teased, winking playfully at his friend. "We'll definitely meet people to your liking, so long as you don't steal eyes off of Wilbur. What was your type, again? Tall, funny-"

"I think that's enough," Sapnap cut him off, his cheeks turning beet red. "I told you that in *confidence* . But I couldn't possibly intrude. Besides, I'm not appropriately dressed for an event like that."

George pulled away from his mother and linked his arm with his friend, beginning to drag him out of the room.

"Then it looks like it's your turn to get changed."

A few hours later, they finally arrived at Gold. The carriage was a little more cramped than usual with Sapnap tagging along, but it was nice and the whole ride was filled with playful banter and quips. Ever since the incident with The Nether, his parents had held Sapnap to a much higher regard. Perhaps it was the way he took charge while they were distraught, or the way he seemed to be just as emotionally affected by their son’s disappearance as they were. Either way, the advisor had been valued as one of their own, even so far as to take him to a banquet and let him ride with

them. George was thankful.

Sapnap, understandably, was a little anxious when they arrived. This was not his scene. He wasn't accustomed to the glitz of foreign crowns, waltzing strangers, the clinking of champagne glasses. And while it wasn't necessarily an unwanted change, it definitely took some warming up to.

Noticing Sapnap's discomfort, George nudged him lightly with his shoulder, offering a smile.

"Come on, let's get you a drink."

The man smiled gratefully, following George to the refreshments.

All around him, royals and established individuals alike whom he had only learnt about through his seniors on the board socialised. He felt incredibly out of place. The scene before him was difficult to process; The bright lights, colourful attire, well-groomed prince and princesses were surreal compared to the books which spoke of them. Sure, working at Diamond had exposed him to snippets of such a life before, but seeing the Davidsons off in their fancy dressing every other month was a much tamer experience than seeing a whole *room* of people richer and more powerful than he.

His fingers closed around a glass before he knew it, snapping him back to his immediate surroundings.

"Sap? You alright?"

"Yeah, sorry. This is just... not how I expected to spend my Friday evening."

George offered an encouraging smile.

"Don't worry about it. Listen, this event is a lot less formal than it seems. Think of it as a big party, more than anything. It's for Wilbur to find suitors, remember? Nothing more, nothing less."

"Then why are we here, exactly?"

"... *Okay*, maybe it's a little more than that. King Philza's attempt at helping Wilbur find someone to court is secondary, really, *but* my point still stands. It's supposed to be a celebration, bringing people together. This one's much different from the ball Dream threw before."

Sapnap sighed, eyeing the glass for a moment before downing it in one go.

"Alright, fair enough. Do I have to go schmooze the aristocrats now?" He asked, setting it down the glass. George scrunched his face up.

"Don't say *schmooze*. Go talk to people. Strike up a conversation."

"What do I even talk about?" He groaned. "I have nothing in common with 'em."

"You don't know that." Sapnap looked at him with a pout. "Look, find someone who looks interesting and try and say hi. And if you don't know what to talk about, ask them questions and bounce off of that. I can't believe I have to *tell* you how to talk to people."

"Hey, I've been helping you out all these years and now you finally have the chance to give me advice, you're getting annoyed?" Sapnap teased, holding himself back from giving George a playful shove. They were in public, after all.

"Okay, that's fair. But honestly, I think you'll do fine once you break the ice." Glancing over

Sapnap's shoulder, he saw Dream beckoning him over. With the mask covering the upper half of his face, he found it difficult to read his expression when all he could see was the slight uptick of his lips. "I've got to go, but I'll come find you soon."

"Wha- You're leaving me all alone already?"

"You'll manage. Find someone who catches your eye and go for it!"

With that, George was gone, frolicking off to some unknown corner of the castle with his lover and leaving Sapnap alone. Taking a deep breath, he picked up another glass and scanned the room. Almost instantly, a brunette standing in the corner caught his attention. He seemed a little spaced out, eyes trained to the ground. He donned white robes, probably made of silk, held together with gold buttons and various accessories of the like. The slits in fabric hung from his shoulders and reconnected at his elbows.

As he found himself stepping closer, Sapnap noticed the little white gems adorning his gold neckpiece and diadem. He was enraptured.

"Hi." His mouth moved before his brain did.

And when the man looked over with wide grey eyes, Sapnap believed he had never seen a man so breathtaking in his life. A shy smile curved onto the gentle features, one that Sapnap couldn't help but mirror.

"Hello."

"What's your name?"

"Oh, I'm, uh, I'm Karl." Internally, Sapnap's heart jumped. He knew exactly who this man was, and exactly the country he was second-in-line to rule. "What's yours?"

Stood before him, he realised, was the prince of Quartz himself, as ethereal as the stories made him out to be. The lines on his cheek, while faint as with most from the north-most regions of The Nether, accentuated his cheekbones well. They were barely noticeable, but they highlighted them subtly and perfectly.

"I'm N-" He hesitated for a beat. Reaching out a hand, he introduced himself with the name he better resonated with. "I'm Sapnap."

"That's a lovely name."

"So where are you taking me, your highness?"

Dream let out a groan at the title, nudging the prince gently. George laughed. They weaved their way through the people, slipping out of the ballroom and making their way up an empty staircase. Their hands interlaced, the blonde walked a step ahead to guide him.

"The library. I wanted to show you something."

"This isn't even your castle, are you allowed to wander?" George teased lightly, giving a gentle squeeze to his hand as they pushed through the large birch doors.

Beyond it, shelves of books lined the walls, with a handful of tables forged from a similar shade of wood spaced out. George could almost picture Wilbur, years younger than now, sitting by one of those with a tutor across from him, teaching him. It was quiet, a welcomed contrast from the bustle of the party. Running his finger along the gold trimmings, he took a seat.

“They gave the okay. Besides, I left this here when I was showing it to Techno the other time.”

Dream, who had since disappeared amongst the neat towers of books, reemerged in George’s sight with a notebook in his hands- small, slightly frayed with wear and tear. It was bound in leather, and the pages, while creased, maintained its pristine white shade. The king slid his mask and crown of his head, sitting them on the table as bystanders. His shy gaze met with George’s. Smiling at the sight of the man before him, George did the same with his own diadem.

“What’s this, then? It’s improper to whisk a man from a party, you know.”

“Have I ever been one for propriety?” Dream asked with a brow raised.

“As King of Emerald, I’d hope so.”

“You’re speaking to Dream now, darling. But, I digress. I did bring you here for a reason.” The quiet hum of the book being slid across the table brought George’s attention back down to it. “I want to show you my old writing.”

George’s playful demeanour softened as he read the engraving on the brown leather surface. The name ‘Clayton’ had been struck through, and in a larger, cruder font, the name ‘Dream’ had been carved through, ruining the quality material in a perfect and needed way. It was once a prim and proper journal, that much was clear. But with the various scratches (intentional and unintentional alike) as well as the dog-eared pages personalized it to present a more honest, perfectly imperfect embodiment of Dream’s unhidden appearance. And the thought that within this cover was strings of words revealing the deepest parts of Dream’s thoughts and emotions was exhilarating in the most intimate way.

“Dream... Are you sure?” His voice was soft, leaving ample room for Dream to have a change of heart, to back out of this transaction with his air of mystery and walls intact.

He did not. The book remained where it sat, in front of George.

Still, Dream found himself looking down at his hands. He was nervous. He had known that this was something he wanted to do for a while, but that didn’t take away from the anxiety of sharing such a personal piece of art.

“I’m sure. Only... Only if you want to, of course. Read it, that is. I talk a lot about the boy in there, and I’d understand if that’d make you uncomfor-”

“I would never give up an opportunity to learn more about you.”

With that, page after page, George read through them and Dream simply sat, giving George the occasional glance. As much as he wanted to see the pretty expression on his face as he concentrated, Dream couldn’t bring himself to look for too long when he knew that, in a way, George was looking back with a thousand times the intensity, peering into his soul through his poems and paragraphs and unlatching the locks on the window to dive in himself.

The way Dream wrote about demigods, mountains and the universe, both physical and the one in his mind, had George’s eyes tingling with warmth; it was a familiar pressure against the dams threatening to spill over. He clung to every word, every rhyme, every pretty metaphor that he

would analyze a thousand times over if there were enough hours in a lifetime. Even the messier pages, with lines cancelled out and even blackened out completely with heavy strokes to hide what was initially said, had the brunette thumbing the corner of the page gently. The love in his sonnets about a boy George had never met, the grief, anger and sorrow in the poems about his late mother, the occasional paragraph about menial things like a flower he had seen while riding, all of these had him absolutely enraptured and a weighted, warm feeling filled his chest.

By the time he reached the last page, he looked up, tears prickling his eyes. Dream looked back with a shy smile.

“Hi,” he said, to which George let out a wet laugh, voice cracking slightly.

“Hi,” he responded, closing the book and holding it to his chest gingerly. “You’re... You’re wonderful, you know that?”

George wasn’t the best with heartfelt words, but he didn’t need to be. Dream understood the emotion behind that, as that was what Dream felt every single time he watched George so focused on his painting, every time he glanced at George staring up at the stars in awe. The overwhelming affection, understanding of one’s raw, unconscious self.

“Thank you. You are too,” Dream began slowly, reaching into his pocket where a folded piece of paper sat. He reached forward and placed it hesitantly atop the book. “I wrote you one. I know I promised I’d put the words together properly to show how I really feel about you, and it’s long overdue, but better late than never.”

George let out another laugh, wiping his eyes quickly before picking up the piece of paper.

“You wrote one for me? That’s just not fair, I didn’t bring anything for you,” George mumbled.

“I never expected you to. This is another selfish act; It was for me to tell you how I really feel without worrying about speaking it perfectly.”

Honey's scent, may fae pay us a visit,

Bringing doves and lilies of the valley

For the universe is as complicit

Giving us as worthy a finale.

They envy you; The trees, the hills, the beach,

As they know that the sun loves you tenfold

And that all of the landscapes fail to reach

Let alone exceed the beauty you hold.

Diadems stake claim to our duties

Yet earth stakes claim to your mortality.

To you, I give all diamonds and rubies

As you own my heart and vitality.

My love, the universe waits for no pair

Yet she's blessed us with her utmost care.

By the end of it, George was trembling. He barely registered the arms that wrapped around him, but subconsciously leaned into the touch. The taller male stroked his hair through it, leaning over from behind the chair. When it seemed like George had finished reading, he took the piece of paper gently from his hand and placed it back on the table, freeing the hands that then clutched onto Dream's arm.

"You're too kind to me," he managed to croak out between hiccups. The blonde simply smiled, wiping his own stray tears. He stayed there for a while, despite the awkward position, comforting the man of his dreams.

"I'm yours," Dream whispered. "Completely, unequivocally yours."

From across the ballroom, Wilbur Has been tirelessly socializing with the men and women from various regions. Some were pompous, using the time he'd granted them to boast about their families accomplishments in hopes that it would be what won Wilbur over. On the other hand, some took a more genuine approach, telling him stories of their travels and their hobbies. He was more appreciative when he came across them. Still, none seemed to click as well as he'd hoped.

"Any luck?"

He simply sighed, turning around to face the source of the voice and offering a sheepish smile.

"Not yet, no."

"Yeah, me neither. Some lovely people, but none who stand out," Niki agreed. "Honestly, I think you should still try to talk to some of them more. Feelings don't develop in five minutes."

"I know, but that's what this kind of love should be, isn't it? Exhilarating, eager," Wilbur argued.

"You're idealistic. I know you're a hopeless romantic, but those impossible expectations will get you nowhere," Niki chided, taking a glance across the room. "Love can be calm, comfortable. It doesn't have to be too exciting or life-changing, it just has to be real."

The pout that grew on Wilbur's face came from a place of knowing she was right.

"I know."

From behind him, a hand rested on his shoulder, heavy yet tender. He was pulled into a half-embrace by the man who he instantly recognised without having to look.

"Still looking for the one?"

"Yeah. Niki's just told me off as well."

"I told you," Techno said with a laugh, his eyes crinkling. It was his first event without his mask on, and the hesitation from earlier that day had finally eased up. The glass of champagne in his free hand definitely had something to do with it.

"I wasn't going to take relationship advice from you. Especially with your track record of trust, Mr 'Friends Aren't Important'."

Techno pulled his hand back to rest on his heart, a feign wounded look on his face. The absurdity of the uncharacteristic dramatics had both him and Niki giggling.

"I'm wounded, Will. Did you think dad and I got along in a day?"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it," Wilbur sighed. "I'll get back to mingling, and I *promise* I'll keep an open mind."

Techno seemed content with this, until he recalled a conversation he'd had moments prior.

"Oh, forgot to tell you. Alistair wants to talk to you."

The soft look on Wilbur's face soured, making Techno almost laugh. His voice lowered so nobody could overhear their conversation.

"I don't get why dad invited him. All he's going to do is bug the guests and turn people off. This is supposed to be casual, but you know him. Everything's a test with that guy."

"Well," Techno drawled, nudging him and nodding his head towards the wall, where Eret stood laughing along with some guests. An unusual sight indeed. "He seems to be doing alright."

"Did he mention what he wanted?"

"Nope, didn't seem bad, if that's what you're wondering."

With his lip between his teeth in contemplation, Wilbur let out an ambiguous hum.

All of a sudden, the bridge of Wilbur's nose felt awfully pinch-able. His grip on his glass tightened a little and instead, he willfully shifted his attention to Techno's hand. He reached for it, examining the new metal prosthetic fingers that had been fitted just that morning. The ring and pinky fingers, once present and fleshy and human, now a cool, solid steel, rigid and immobile.

"How does it feel?"

Techno was a little too inebriated to bother calling out Wilbur's change of topic.

"Eh, 's fine. They might make one I can move in a couple months, but 'till then, I'll deal with this chunk 'a metal."

"Yeah? That'll be neat."

"Yeah. Maybe I'll learn to play an instrument when that happens, make better use of them."

"If the prosthetic allows it, I'll help out."

"And I'll appreciate that. On that note, 'm gonna need a refill, so I'll catch you later, alright?"
Techno nudged Wilbur gently before downing the rest of his champagne. Wilbur pat his back and let him go.

"Well, you should probably get it out of the way," Niki said with a small, encouraging smile.

"Yeah, you're probably right," he sighed. "I'll see you later."

"Good luck!"

With that, Wilbur begrudgingly made his way over to where the man was. Noticing him approaching, Eret looked up with a smile and excused himself from the circle politely.

"Prince Wilbur Soot Watson. Pleasure to see you again, I've been looking for you," the Redstone king spoke smoothly, extending his hand out to Wilbur. With a professional air to him, he shook it. Noticing the vague stiffness, Eret withdrew his hand right after.

"So I've heard. What is it you wanted to discuss?"

After taking a small sip of his wine, Eret spoke.

"I wanted to discuss a truce."

This confused Wilbur. Redstone and Gold had a rather amicable relationship, and even if they didn't, there wasn't much of a say a Prince had in it.

"I wasn't aware we were at war."

"Were we not?" There was a surprising lack of snarkiness in the way Eret addressed Wilbur. "It feels as though you have your bow drawn every time I'm in your vicinity."

Wilbur almost laughed at that.

"Is that what this is about? Finally confronting our animosity?"

"I want to put an end to it. Granted, I haven't been the kindest to you either, but I don't want it to continue." Eret spoke with an uptick at the end of his tone, as though he was making some sort of business proposition. And in a way, he was.

"We don't like each other, Alistair. I don't quite know what you're asking for here."

"And we don't have to. All I ask is that we curb our distaste, because hate isn't the prettiest of looks on royals like us."

Wilbur scanned his eyes for even a hint of insincerity. None was found. He narrowed his eyes slightly, and Eret didn't even flinch at the scrutiny he was under.

"What brought this along?"

Finally, the king's gaze faltered.

"The war. Ever since Schlatt's been out of the picture, things are just different. Gold and Emerald

have freed the continent from his clutches and while I know you weren't at the forefront of the battle, I know that you led the strategizing of the movement of troops."

"It wasn't just me. Lady Niki was heavily involved, it wouldn't have gone as smoothly without her," Wilbur added. By now, he had lowered his walls a little. Eret really did seem genuine in his gratitude.

"Of course. And I will thank her in my own time."

"I hope you know that this won't change the fact that I'll disagree with you fairly often."

"Of course, I don't expect you to change your opinions over this. Perhaps we'll get to a point where we can discuss it amicably, with open minds. But that's something to concern ourselves later down the line. For now, though, what do you say? Acquaintances?"

Wilbur let his lips fall into a thin line, staring at Eret for a moment longer. His hand was outstretched for another handshake, though one of a far different meaning. He let out a small hum, accepting it. The shake that followed was more casual, with far less hesitance on Wilbur's end.

"Acquaintances."

It wasn't long before all the guests were gathered in the banquet hall. A vast array of dishes were laid across the pristine white cloth, carefully and meticulously crafted, a collaboration between Gold and Emerald chefs. The aromas of perfectly cooked steaks, chicken and lamb melded with the sweetness of the sugary cakes and other desserts in a way that had everyone at the table salivating. While waiting for the last of the dishes to be brought out, the guests were talking amongst themselves, creating a comfortable, boisterous atmosphere.

At the head of the table sat Phil. By his side, Techno leaned back, idly chatting with the older of his two brothers, as Niki listened along from next to them. She would occasionally chirp in with a comment that had her two friends laughing heartily. Across from them and on the other side of Phil, Tommy was animated, engrossed in telling a story to his best friend. Tubbo would shove him playfully, sending them both in fits of giggles. Tubbo would talk about the new arrangement he had with Dream which all allowed him more time with his family and still allowed him to fulfil his duties in the castle.

George and Dream finally arrived at the two seats saved for them at the other end of the table. George's puffy face had dried up by then and so had Dream's, though it didn't matter since most of it was hidden behind the white disc he donned. This left behind an atmosphere between them matching that of the room. They laughed and teased one another as they sat, hands interlocked under the table, and they were lost in their own world.

George did steal a glance across the room, however, catching sight of Sapnap speaking with a prince he didn't quite recognise. It was a relief to know he wasn't alone, and was getting himself well-acquainted with the guests. For a brief moment that Sapnap looked over, George shot a teasing wink in his direction, sending the advisor looking away again. He knew that Sapnap would get him for that one later.

The room quietened down as Phil raised his hand, the chattering mellowing down to whispers and then silence. He cleared his throat.

"Before we begin, I'd like to say a few words. Thank you all for coming today, it is my absolute

pleasure to host a gathering as lively as this one. I understand that some of you have travelled for hours, some even a day or two, just to attend today. To each and every one of you, your presence is much appreciated.”

All eyes were on him at this point, and there wasn't a single attendee who didn't have lingering traces of a smile on their face.

“Today, we sit amongst family, - ”

Techno's attentive expression morphed into that of a smile, looking up at his adoptive father gratefully.

“ - friends, - ”

Wilbur and Niki glanced at one another, a similar expression on their faces. Meanwhile, Sapnap glanced over at George, an eyebrow raised playfully. The prince stuck his tongue out, and he had to bite his lip to keep from laughing next to Karl.

“ - and friends-to-be.”

Sapnap turned his attention over to the Quartz prince, who was engrossed in the speech. His eyes flickered across what he could see of Karl's face - the pure, genuine interest he gave Phil, how his lips parted just barely.

“No matter our ages, backgrounds, statuses, we've come together today and enjoyed an evening in one another's company. I hope everyone here has had the chance to speak to someone they hadn't before, especially now. This is the beginning of a new era for individuals of every continent, especially those who were affected by the rule of Netherite. As we wait and hope for a more compassionate leader to be coronated, we relish in the freedom his absence brings us, and we hold a greater appreciation for one another - as leaders in our own right, and as human beings. I won't keep you from your meals any longer.”

Phil raised his glass up high, and he was joined with the hundred-odd glasses lifted in unison.

“To a bright, new future, and to the loved ones we hold dear!”

Cheers erupted across the room, and the guests tucked in eagerly. The chattering continued, and it never ceased until the early hours of the next morning, when people began filtering out, disappointed to have such a joyous night finally come to an end.

Sometimes, Dream would look back on that night with a strange, unexplainable fondness. Even covered in painful wounds that never healed perfectly, scar tissue leaving behind large, lighter lines across his chest and stomach leaving him with stories etched into his skin. Memories of war and rage and vengeance matching the ones written on his face, hidden behind a mask and swearing him to secrecy. Only his closest confidants had the (mis)fortune of reading those stories, apart from the few brave soldiers sharing that voyage home with him. But they'd forget the sight of the rigid, harsh lines carved into his face eventually, and his secrets would be his own once again.

That being said, it wasn't those marks that made Dream's head spin. It was the invisible ones, ghostly fingertips where soft skin met his pale face, where their hands interlocked into one. It was

the sweet gestures that remained imprinted on him even to this day, cradling him and holding him close. He couldn't cover those, he didn't *want* to cover those. And even though nobody was really able to see them, he bore them proudly in case they somehow could.

He had hoped for this from the beginning, but he never really expected for it to turn out this perfect.

It was written in his palms for years, his love-line extending from the base of his pinky to the webbing by his index so cleanly and hinting at a love so pure, so beautiful and so resilient. At first, he thought it was in reference to the past, with his first real love, the first boy he believed in - and when his fantasies of love were crushed, ripped to shreds and scattered across the sea they once listened to together, he thought his palms were lying. But as he'd come to realise, they were telling him to wait. The world wasn't ready yet, and neither was he. His palms told the truth.

And it was written in the stars from the beginning, the cosmos and constellations promising him that this was how it was supposed to be, this was his happy ending, even though it wasn't quite the end just yet. He was born to love, and he will die to love, and his lover was exactly the same. They were twin flames, bouncing through the universe across different lives, across any boundaries of space and time and they were bound to finally collide in this one, lips meeting lips, heart meeting heart again and again and again. Dream couldn't fathom a life without his love, his soulmate, and he was thankful that he didn't have to.

As now they lay, hand in hand, head to chest, under the blanket and the gentle warmth of the moonlight.

"I love you," he whispered. "I love you more than life itself."

George couldn't help the smile on his face.

"Really?"

"More than life itself."

"That's not possible. Of all the things you've shown me, all the feelings you've made me feel, I'd argue that you *are* Life. You are every swaying flower, and every thorn you pick off of it."

Dream let out a laugh, quiet and tender.

"Oh, come on, now."

"You are. You see that?" George guided their linked hand up, letting one finger lift from the man's knuckles to point up into the tree they were nestled under. "Those leaves, how they all move separately yet all at once, altogether?"

"Yeah?"

"You're all of them. You're Life."

Dream laughed again, the familiar tint of pink meeting his skin and George wanted to trace it out with the freckles on his cheeks, see how flustered the usually-stoic man could get.

"You," Dream mumbled, his voice low. He buried his face in the crook of his neck. "Are too kind to me, my love. Careful, or I might hold onto you forever, never let you go."

"I'd let you." George looked up at the stars, toying with the soft blonde hair between his fingers.

"I'd let you keep me forever, and I'd go wherever you go."

Dream lifted his head again. He looked at George in awe, the way the stars flickered in his widened eyes and the way his lips parted just slightly as he took in the vast expanse before him. He saw how speechless the sight had the brunette. Regardless of how many hours he had seen them this way, he looked on, absolutely starstruck, and it felt like the first time every time.

The stars really were prettier in Emerald.

And George was prettier in Emerald as well, tangled in his arms, faces inches apart, and the thick blanket shielding them from the late winter breeze.

"I think you're Love, then."

He watched the way George's face scrunched up slightly and listened intently to the soft laugh that left his lips.

"I'm Love?"

"You're Love."

Dream had a way of creating metaphors that sounded absurd at first, but with proper explanation and flowery words, he'd make them make sense. The prince was even convinced that he'd come up with them in the spur of the moment, and improvised the explanation. Each time, George would be surprised by how he'd managed to make connections to even the most obscure of details. They always made sense, though, and they always made his heart beat a tiny bit quicker.

" *Please* , Dream, *do* tell me how you're gonna string *this* one together," George mumbled lightly. His teasing tone got lost in his chest, however, when he saw the look in Dream's eyes - intense, honest, wanting to show George the world, asking for permission to look into his soul and keep his secrets for him.

"You're Love," he began, reaching a hand up to brush his fingertips along George's jaw, light and barely-there touches, "because you *choose* to love. Day after day, you decide that people are worthy of love, and you decide to show them love."

"Because people *are* worthy of love," George spoke quietly, his voice barely a whisper.

"You're Love because you bring me to new heights and keep bringing me higher. Sometimes when the light hits your eyes a certain way, they look like Autumn, the one when we first met. They look like the leaves that littered the ground, different hues yet coherent all the same, a mosaic of life, past present and future. You're Love because every time you touch me, you remind me *how* to love. You remind me to be vulnerable, to let people in, to *let* people love. And every time you smile at me, I let you love."

George could feel the tears brimming at this point. It was a gradual buildup, the slow rising of warmth from his throat to deep behind his eyes, slowly growing more and more overwhelming. And Dream could tell, too, the way the moon reflected a little easier in his pupils. From how they laid, it took barely any resistance before they made a home of the pillow they rested on, crossing the bridge of his nose and sliding down his left cheek. Dream brought his other hand up, gently wiping them with his thumb and planting tender kisses along where they were.

"That day, the first time by the creek. D'you remember what we talked about?"

George let out a quiet snuffle, accompanied by an embarrassed laugh for how emotional he was just

from Dream's words alone. He was unravelling before his emerald eyes, and Dream wanted to savour every heartfelt look he could get.

"About the fae?"

"Kind of. About people, about having faith in them?"

He watched the recognition click behind George's glossy eyes.

"Whether evil is born or made. Yeah, I remember. You weren't so sure of the answer yourself."

Dream smiled.

"Yeah. Well, I'm sure now. I think humans were born for love. We're given love and when we're not, it's easy to forget how to receive it. But we cling onto it as much as we can because we have to, because it's all we should know. And you, my love, are all I should know. You are Love and I am Life, and as long as we have each other side by side, nothing else needs to matter."

George leaned closer, his skin radiating more warmth than usual. The tears were drying now, but his eyes were still glossy, overwhelmed with the amount of raw, unfiltered affection he felt conveyed through Dream's words. In threads, laced together and strung along, they penetrated his skin and embedded themselves into his heart, where they'd stay forever. With his voice, just shy of audible, he spoke. The words weren't heard by the king before him, but they were definitely felt, as their lips finally met once again in a burst of emotion and passion and everything of the sort.

Love whispered,

"I love you."

And Life whispered,

"I love you too."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for coming with me on this journey. Over three months of writing finally coming to an end, and it's definitely a bittersweet feeling. This may be turned into a series, so stay tuned for a sequel! I have a couple ideas bouncing around in my head. But before that, I have a slightly shorter fic in the works, it's called Cigarette Daydreams (was originally a one-shot, but I'm turning it into a proper fic as soon as I can) and it's a music store DNF AU with about 7 chapters!

Please let me know what you think, I'll be responding to every comment in this last chapter.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!